

VERVE



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. RESTAURANT - MALIBU - DUSK

Like *French Laundry* in Napa Valley, this restaurant is a one of its kind high end destination spot where people go for special occasions, photo ops and bragging rights.

INT. RESTAURANT - BAR - DUSK

TITLE CARD: **Chapter One -- "For Better, for Worse."**

BRETT HARDWICK (42) is a well built man with a nice face. In any other city he'd be a hunk, in LA, meh, he's maybe a 6.

Brett sits alone at the relatively empty bar, nursing a scotch and soda.

MICHELLE (36) approaches in a red dress. With her dark hair and fair skin, she's a god damn knockout. And she's side-eyeing Brett like he's on the menu.

MICHELLE
This seat taken?

BRETT
No, have at it.

Brett slides his drink over to make room. Michelle sits on the stool next to him.

MICHELLE
(to bartender)
I'd like a martini -- extra dirty.
(to Brett)
You come here often?

As soon as it's out of her mouth, she realizes --

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Wow. That was bad. I'm obviously
out of practice.

BRETT
No, it's a perfectly good question.
I do not come here often. You?

MICHELLE
Never.

The BARTENDER lays a martini on the counter for Michelle.

BRETT

You look so familiar. Are you an actress?

MICHELLE

I've been in a few things.

BRETT

That's where I've seen you!

MICHELLE

People usually remember me from --

BRETT

No, let me guess. I know this.

He studies her face.

BRETT (CONT'D)

"Hollywood Hills Hotel."

MICHELLE

Wow. I'm impressed. Nobody ever gets it.

BRETT

I see everything.

MICHELLE

Oh? You on house arrest?

BRETT

(laughs)

No, I'm a reality TV producer.

MICHELLE

Wow. Anything I've seen?

BRETT

You seen "The Groom?"

MICHELLE

Oh my God, yes! Your billboards are all over town. I love "The Groom." Anything with roses and dates on horseback... I'm all over it.

BRETT

So you haven't sworn off dating?

MICHELLE

What?

BRETT
When you said "out of practice"
earlier, I didn't know if you
meant...?

MICHELLE
Married.

Michelle holds up a ring. Beautiful diamond. Expensive.

BRETT
Ah, I see.

MICHELLE
Eleven years.

BRETT
Fuck. You do not look old enough to
be married eleven years. I thought
child brides were out of vogue.

His faux disbelief makes Michelle laugh.

MICHELLE
I'm old enough to make my own
decisions.

She's definitely coming on to him. Brett takes a sip of his
drink, thinking.

BRETT
It's my anniversary.

MICHELLE
Wow. Congratulations. She's a lucky
woman.

BRETT
I don't know about that.

MICHELLE
What do you mean?

BRETT
Would you want a husband who was in
a bar on your anniversary having
dirty thoughts about the sexy woman
sitting next to him?

Michelle stares at him. This just passed to the next level.

MICHELLE
She meeting you here? Your wife?

BRETT

Later.

Michelle leans close to Brett, lowers her voice.

MICHELLE

Well then, for your anniversary,
I'd like to give you something.

BRETT

What?

MICHELLE

I'm going to suck you off in the
broom closet.

Brett chokes on his drink. Laughs again. But Michelle's not joking. She sucks on her straw, twirling it in her mouth.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

What do you say?

INT. BROOM CLOSET, RESTAURANT - DUSK

CLOSE ON: Brett's face as he gets a blow job. He's enjoying the hell out of it. But before he climaxes, he pulls Michelle up. She smiles at him. Brett hikes up her red dress and fucks her up against the wall.

Michelle puts her hand over her mouth to try to keep quiet --

MINUTES LATER:

It's all over.

Brett and Michelle are left flushed and out of breath.

She looks at him. He looks at her. Neither says anything.
What now?

INT. RESTAURANT - BAR - NIGHT

Brett returns to his stool at the bar unaware that his hair is mussed up. His drink is where he left it. The ice has melted down.

Michelle enters a few moments later, straightening her skirt. Her necklace has got twisted around.

She slides her drink down the bar and takes a seat a few stools away from Brett. She eats an olive from her dirty martini and doesn't look at him. He doesn't look her way either.

The bartender is the only one who appears to have noticed this whole escapade. He looks at Brett and Michelle and then around at the smattering of other bar PATRONS. Absorbed in their phones, no one seems to have noticed anything.

A HOSTESS approaches the bar.

HOSTESS
Mr. and Mrs. Hardwick?

BRETT MICHELLE
Yes? Yes?

HOSTESS
Your table is ready. Follow me,
please.

Brett and Michelle smile at each other, enjoying their secret game. Brett takes his wife's hand and they follow the hostess--

INT. RESTAURANT - SUNSET

-- to the best seat in the house.

The view overlooks the unparalleled Malibu stretch of the Pacific ocean. Right now the sun is setting in pinks and reds. The timing couldn't be more perfect.

HOSTESS
The waiter will be with you soon.

Hostess turns to leave. Brett stops her.

BRETT
(privately)
Um, I called ahead and talked to
the Maitre'd --

As if waiting in the wings for his cue, the MAITRE'D arrives, brandishing a bottle of champagne and pours two glasses.

MAITRE'D
Happy anniversary, Mr. and Mrs.
Hardwick.

BRETT MICHELLE
Thank you. Thank you.

The Maitre'D places the champagne bottle in the table side bucket of ice and walks away. Brett and Michelle are left alone at their beautiful table, looking beautiful. They smile at each other. Happy.

BRETT
Do we toast?

Instead, Michelle leans across and straightens Brett's mussed up, post closet sex, hair.

MICHELLE
Happy anniversary, babe.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT - LATER

Dinner in progress. The lights of Santa Monica are now visible far down the beach - ghostly and ethereal in the fog that's rolling up the coast.

BRETT
Okay, worst anniversary?

MICHELLE
Wow. There have been so many.

BRETT
Try to pick one.

MICHELLE
Okay, for me, it'd have to be the Bahamas.

BRETT
Yes!

MICHELLE
Not the private house once we got there, but the one night stay at the Atlantis resort that turned into a four day nightmare.

BRETT
That was a shit show. Correct.

MICHELLE
I like the novelty now of being able to tell people we were caught in a hurricane. But I so hated actually being in one, trapped in that shitty, leaky, piece of shit, hotel for four days. The worst.

BRETT
I swear they jacked their prices as soon as they saw no one could leave.

MICHELLE
They absolutely did.

BRETT
But we did get to eat at Nobu every
night.

MICHELLE
When world class sushi costs the
same as a wedge salad, you go for
the yellow tail.

Brett enjoys his last bite of food and pushes his plate back.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Okay. Best anniversary?

BRETT
Hard. There have been so many.

MICHELLE
Choose, babe.

BRETT
(voice lowered)
Tonight? Or is it too early to call
it?

MICHELLE
Tonight doesn't count yet. Pick
another one.

BRETT
Machu Picchu.

The WAITER, a 10 in any town USA, stops by the table.

WAITER
Can I interest you in dessert
tonight? We got mini baked Alaskas-

BRETT
No, thank you. We're good.

WAITER
Okay.
(as he clears plates)
What anniversary is it?

MICHELLE
Eleventh.

WAITER

No, I mean what anniversary? Like what gift are you suppose to give-?

BRETT

Huh, I really don't know.

MICHELLE

We'll have to look it up.

WAITER

So what's the secret to a happy marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Hardwick?

BRETT

You got to be all in.

The waiter nods stupidly as if soaking in these words of wisdom and then walks away.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Have we had him before?

MICHELLE

A lot. His name is Henry. He gave you a headshot. Remember?

BRETT

That's the same guy?

MICHELLE

Yeah.

BRETT

God, there's too many good looking men in this town.

EXT. VALET STAND - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Brett and Michelle stand at the valet stand, waiting for their car to be brought around.

A little TV at the valet stand plays a NEWS REPORT about a string of home invasions. It's in Spanish, so we get to read the subtitles.

NEWS REPORTER (O.S.)

...police say it's unclear if these are the work of one home invader or separate home invaders...

A young Latino VALET comes around the corner in a blue Tesla.

He parks the car in front of Brett and Michelle. Brett opens his wallet, looking for tip money. A second VALET holds the passenger side door open for Michelle.

Suddenly, the doors of the restaurant open and Henry, the handsome waiter, comes out, waving them down. Michelle looks to Brett. *What is this?*

BRETT
(quiet: for Michelle)
New headshot?

The waiter runs up with a big smile.

WAITER
It's steel.

BRETT
What is?

WAITER
Your eleventh anniversary. It's
steel, man.

The waiter smiles, pleased with himself and his ability to google things on his phone. Michelle smiles at Brett. *Say something.* Brett gives the waiter a thumbs up.

EXT. PCH - NIGHT

Michelle and Brett drive home, laughing.

BRETT
I remember him now.

MICHELLE
He had "juggling" on his resume.

BRETT
He wanted to be "the Groom."
Fucking unbelievable this town.
(occurs to him)
You think he's cute? Is that why
you remember his name?

MICHELLE
I remember him because he's me.

Off Brett's confused look --

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
You ever wonder what I'd be doing
if I hadn't met you? I'd be Henry
if I was lucky.
(MORE)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
That's a good restaurant. He
probably gets nice tips.

BRETT
World's smallest violin playing
over here. You're beautiful,
talented, smart as hell --

MICHELLE
And always a thin line away from a
shitty apartment in North Hollywood
that I share with another lady --
named Pam -- who wanted to be an
actress too. Like me, Pam's waking
up to the fact that she's thirty-
five and a career waitress. Like
me, Pam's realizing her dreams are
never going to come true no matter
how bad she wanted them to.

(beat)
If I ever end up back there, kill
me.

BRETT
You go so dark, babe.

EXT. MALIBU HILLS - NIGHT

They pull off PCH onto a smaller road. As they drive higher
up into the hills, the roads get narrower. "GUILTY" by Barbra
Streisand and Barry Gibb PLAYS on the car stereo.

MICHELLE
Aw, I love this song.

BRETT
I know. I should've made it our
first dance.

Michelle kisses Brett, lowers her window and sings along --

MICHELLE
*"...And we got nothing to be guilty
of -- Our love will climb any
mountain near or far --"*

Brett, ever a good sport, turns up the volume and joins her.

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

The Hardwicks have been blessed. Big house. Nice cars. Good
landscapers. Their monstrous Spanish Colonial sits back from
the small road behind an iron gate.

As Brett and Michelle drive up the hill and pull into their driveway, they pass a janky orange NOVA PARKED on a dirt turnout down the hill from their house.

The SONG ends as the gate opens. Brett and Michelle DRIVE up to the house as the security gate CLOSES behind them.

Down the hill, in the Nova, a MAN sits up in the passenger seat, rising from the shadows.

INT. FOYER - HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Brett puts his keys down. Michelle takes off her heels.

MICHELLE
I'm going up to bed.

BRETT
I'll lock up.

INT. STAIRCASE - HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Michelle climbs the front staircase, heels in her hand.

On the landing, she passes a framed picture of "The Groom: Season One" that's hung on the wall. It features a handsome, blonde man and the caption: "*Jake - NASA Astronaut and Olympian.*"

It's crooked. Michelle notices but doesn't fix it. She heads on up to the second floor.

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Brett walks along a trail of crushed shell, through a nice assortment of succulents, cacti, and drought-resistant grass.

Tonight's fog makes everything feel like a secret garden. A big, white, wall of fog, sits like a hedge right at the edge of visibility, surrounding everything.

Brett hears something -- SHOES CRUNCHING the crushed shell on the trail. He stops and looks around --

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

The TV in the bathroom PLAYS as Michelle brushes her teeth and does her facial tightening exercises in the mirror.

NEWS PUNDIT (O.S.)
*...the only reason we're hearing
about these home invasions is
because they're happening in
wealthy neighborhoods...*

Michelle lowers her face to the sink.

A **MAN** stands behind her in the master closet. Dressed in BLACK from head to toe, he wears a scary-as-fuck SKI MASK with white piping.

Michelle looks back up, brushing her teeth. When she next leans over to spit, the man is gone.

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Brett listens. He looks around but hears nothing.

He follows the foot trail to the front pedestrian gate. It's unlocked and slightly open.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Even though she's alone in the room, Michelle uses her hand and forearm to cover her breasts when she removes her dress and puts on a nightshirt.

As she slips off her panties and shimmies into a new pair, she sees something --

The French doors to the balcony are OPEN.

EXT. BALCONY, OFF MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

-- Michelle walks out onto the balcony and looks around. On any other night there would be a five million dollar view in front of her, but tonight it's only fog and a steep, straight drop down into the dry, grassy wilds of Malibu.

Michelle SHIVERS. 40,000 years of evolution tell her she's being watched. *She knows it.*

She looks back into the bedroom, but there's no one there --

She looks over the balcony down into the yard. Nothing.

Following a sixth sense, she slowly turns and looks up behind her towards the mansion two hundred feet further up the steep hillside.

A MAN in a blue BATHROBE stands out on his patio smoking a Cuban. He looks ghostly and dreamlike in the fog. He raises his chubby arm in greeting.

MICHELLE
(under her breath)
Fucking creep.
(loud)
Good night, Mr. Powalski!

MR. POWALSKI (55) is the only neighbor within sight tonight, and with the thickening fog, his house is already halfway out of view. Powalski HOLLERS something to Michelle, but she can't hear him. She laughs politely and waves.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

'Night!

(quiet)

Perv.

Someone comes up behind her, STARTLING her.

She immediately relaxes when she realizes it's just Brett. He nuzzles her neck.

BRETT

Can't decide if you look better in
that red dress or out of it?
Leaning towards "out."

MICHELLE

Thought you'd have had your fill
tonight.

BRETT

Me? Never.

Michelle looks back up at the neighbor's patio, but Powalski's gone. A cloud of blue cigar smoke lingers but it's quickly absorbed into the thick fog.

MICHELLE

Think I figured out where Powalski
gets his money from. He's a
pornographer.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS - INTERCUT

The man in the black ski mask stands in the dark bedroom watching Brett and Michelle on the balcony. Watching Brett kiss Michelle's ear. Watching him cup her breast.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

I don't know, babe. It's late --

BRETT (O.S.)

Come on. It's my anniversary.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Okay, but no lights.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Brett and Michelle come into the room, but the guy is gone --

Or he's hiding back in the shadowy, dark recesses of the master closet with a ringside view --

LATER:

Brett and Michelle have sex. She's phoning it in, but Brett doesn't seem to notice.

Brett finishes and rolls off of Michelle. He grabs her hand and squeezes. Michelle looks up at the ceiling, impenetrable.

LATER:

Michelle STARTLES awake.

The MAN in the ski mask with black piping stands right over her, staring down at her.

Michelle SITS straight up in bed --

MICHELLE
What the fuck?!

She reaches for Brett but he makes a little SNORING SOUND and rolls over --

The man puts his HAND over Michelle's MOUTH.

GUNMAN
Don't make a sound. Do what I say.
Do not fuck up. Understand?

Michelle's eyes are big. She nods that she understands. He takes his hand off her mouth and wipes it on his pants.

GUNMAN (CONT'D)
Gross. It's wet with spit from your mouth.

This reminds him of something. He pulls gardening gloves out of his back pack and puts them on. They're new and a tight fit. And he's struggling to wriggle his hands into them.

He doesn't like Michelle watching him struggle. It makes him angry --

GUNMAN (CONT'D)
Give me your cell phone.

She unplugs it from the bedside charger and hands it over. He shoves it in his pocket.

GUNMAN (CONT'D)
Wake him up.

Michelle squeezes Brett's arm.

MICHELLE
Wake up. Brett? Babe?

She squeezes harder, pinching him awake.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Get up.

A groggy Brett sits up.

BRETT
What is it?

He sees the man standing by his bed.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Who's that?

His question is almost childlike, like the half-asleep Brett hasn't yet processed the ominous ski mask or the shiny Glock 43 in the man's hand. The stainless steel slide catches the glare from the light on the balcony, glittering like jewelry.

MICHELLE
I think he's robbing us, babe.

With a sudden jolt of adrenaline, Brett is fully awake.

BRETT
Oh my God.

The gunman wrestles two zip ties out of his tight jeans and throws them on the bed. He motions to Brett with his gun.

GUNMAN
(to Michelle)
Tie him up.

MICHELLE
What? How?

GUNMAN
Use the zip ties, dummy.

The gunman grabs Brett's cell phone from Brett's side of the bed and shoves it in his coat pocket too.

MICHELLE
I don't know how to use these.

GUNMAN
Figure it the fuck out, lady.

BRETT

You can do it, babe. Come on.

Michelle looks to Brett for direction. To help her out, Brett puts his HANDS TOGETHER behind his back, but Michelle still FUMBLES with the zip ties.

BRETT (CONT'D)

There's like a nob part. See it? At the bottom? You put the end through there and it will sort of click --

MICHELLE

I got it.

BRETT

(whispers)

But not too tight.

His whisper is louder than he intended. *Did the gunman hear?* Michelle looks up to check.

Yep, he heard.

The man comes BARRELING over and BACK HANDS Brett. Hard.

A surprised Michelle takes a sharp intake of air. Brett's shocked too and indignant.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Fuck, man. That really hurt.

The gunman seems uncertain for a minute but regains his resolve. He WAVES his gun at Michelle --

GUNMAN

Finish him up.

Michelle loops the second zip tie through the first and HOOKS it around Brett's wrist. Both wrists are now TIED TOGETHER in ghetto handcuffs.

MICHELLE

What now?

The gunman reaches out and GRABS Michelle by the hair --

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

The gunman PUSHES Michelle down the hall --

MICHELLE

Where are we going? Where are you taking me?

He PRODS her with the MUZZLE of the GUN.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

What do you want?

His silence is the worst part. The gunman STEERS Michelle to the left.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

We have money. We've got a safe in the bedroom. There's jewelry in there. And cash. Lots of cash I think.

He PUSHES her again, to the right.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Whatever you want. Just don't hurt me. Please.

They've arrived at their destination -- the guest room.

He SHOVES Michelle inside --

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

All Michelle can see in the dark, stale room is the queen size bed towards which she's being forced.

MICHELLE

No. Please.

The gunman THROWS her on the bed.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

No!

He grabs her arm.

But Michelle FIGHTS. She pulls her arm loose and HITS him.

She's trying to hurt him, but her struggling is only making him mad.

He WRESTLES Michelle down. Not fucking around, he PINS her to the bed. Then he takes her arm and duct tapes it to the bed post.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Don't do this. Please. I'm begging
you.

Michelle fights, SWINGING at him with her free arm.

But then he SNATCHES her free arm and duct tapes it to the
other bed post, stretching it out painfully to make it reach.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Ouch! You're hurting me!

He takes another piece of duct tape --

RIPS it off the roll with a fleshy, TEARING SOUND --

And pushes it over Michelle's mouth with some satisfaction.

Michelle KICKS at him.

But none of her kicks land anywhere near him because the
gunman is now standing perfectly still at the foot of the
bed, watching Michelle SQUIRM.

It's creepy as hell. He SNORTS dismissively --

GUNMAN
Get over yourself, Mrs. Hardwick.
I'm not going to fuck you.

With that, he turns and leaves the room.

Michelle stops kicking, relieved but still terrified.

Neither Michelle nor the gunman seem to notice that he just
used her last name.

LATER:

Some time has passed. Michelle is still tied to the guest
bed. The neighbor's motion activated patio LIGHTS COME ON,
bathing everything -- the neighbor's yard, the steep, brush-
covered hillside, and the side of the Brett and Michelle's
house that faces the hillside -- in BRIGHT LIGHT.

Michelle looks over at the window. Only a few hundred feet up
the hill, Mr. Powalski's house is now a world away.

The light from the flood lights GLINT off a gun safe on the
floor of the closet. Approximately a foot deep and eight
inches high, it's got a glow-in-the-dark sticker of a green
alien on it.

Michelle eyes the gun safe. Right there. Only ten feet away.

She looks at her binds. She tries to BITE through and spit out the tape covering her mouth.

Then she hears heavy FOOTSTEPS coming down the hall.

The door FLIES open --

The GUNMAN RIPS her duct taped hands from the bed posts and sits her up on the side of the bed. He CRAWLS behind Michelle. The duct tape SCREECHES like something alive as he RIPS it off the roll with his teeth and wraps it around her wrists, binding her newly freed hands together --

GUNMAN (CONT'D)
Don't do anything stupid.

The gunman pulls the Glock out of his waistband and presses the cold metal to the small of Michelle's back.

GUNMAN (CONT'D)
Got it?

She nods her head. The gunman reaches around and RIPS the duct tape off Michelle's mouth in one painful jerk, taking some sadistic pleasure in the pain he's causing her.

Then the gunman THUMPS her on the top of her head with the handle of the gun.

GUNMAN (CONT'D)
Be quiet.

MICHELLE
I will. Sorry.

He THUMPS her again. A little harder this time, enjoying himself. Michelle shrinks down protectively but makes no further noise.

GUNMAN
Be good.

He gets off the bed, dragging her along behind him --

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

There's a sliding wood door that separates the main bedroom area from the his and hers walk-in closets and the bathroom beyond.

The master bedroom is dark, but every light is on in the bathroom, blazing full blast. It's fucking Las Vegas down there between the his and hers walk-in closets.

The gunman DRAGS Michelle to the master bathroom --

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

-- and THROWS her in.

She's relieved to see Brett sitting there on the floor. The gunman PRESSES Michelle down next to him.

Using more duct tape, he TIES her hands to the drawer handles behind her. Then he turns and leaves.

When he gets to the sliding wood door, he slides the big wood door closed. He then turns the lock on the outside. *Doors don't lock on the outside, but closets do.*

They hear the BOLT CLICK. They're LOCKED in. But they're alone.

Michelle and Brett share a look as they wait, listening as the gunman's FOOTSTEPS recede.

Once he's gone, they get to work --

Brett climbs up on his knees and goes to the drawers.

MICHELLE

Second one. On the left.

BRETT

This one?

MICHELLE

Yes. Hurry.

BRETT

I'm going as fast as I can.

Brett tries to open the drawer with his bound hands behind his back, but to do that he's got to squat and the angle is all wrong.

BRETT (CONT'D)

I can't get it. Can you?

MICHELLE

He taped me to the drawer handle.

BRETT

Fuck.

After some WRESTLING --

BRETT (CONT'D)

Got it!

The drawer opens and he finds what he's looking for --
SCISSORS.

MICHELLE

Cut me loose.

He gets down beside Michelle. Scissors held behind him in his bound hands, he POKES the SCISSORS in the general vicinity of Michelle's duct taped hands.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Ouch! What are you doing?

BRETT

I'm leaving the blades open. You have to put the tape in there. And then I'll snip it.

MICHELLE

Ouch. Please don't cut my vein open.

BRETT

Fuck, Michelle. I'm doing my best.

Without being able to see it, Michelle positions her taped hands between the blades of scissors to the best of her ability.

Brett repositions himself, scissor handles in hand. Michelle double checks the positioning. Brett takes a big breath.

BRETT (CONT'D)

You got it?

MICHELLE

I don't know.

BRETT

What do you want me to do?

Michelle braces herself --

MICHELLE

Cut it.

BRETT

Yeah?

MICHELLE

Just do it.

Michelle closes her eyes and scrunches up her face in anticipation of something going wrong.

SNIP -- the SCISSOR BLADES come together, sharp and fast.

BRETT

Did I get it?

Michelle WRIGGLES her wrists, they're coming loose.

MICHELLE

Yes. Do it again, babe.

He does. SNIP. Michelle WRESTLES a hand free. It's still covered in duct tape, but it's no longer attached to her other hand.

BRETT

Yes! Get mine off.

Grabbing the scissors, Michelle tries to get them between the zip tie and Brett's skin, but it's a tight fit.

MICHELLE

It's too tight.

BRETT

Fuck. I told you.

MICHELLE

But, wait, you can still hoist me up without them being cut. We just need to turn you around.

BRETT

Right. Okay. That'll work.

Without further conversation they move into the shower stall--

INT. FOYER - HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

The gunman walks into the foyer, searching for something.

He finds it: the entryway bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM OFF FOYER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The gunman lifts the toilet seat. On second thought, he closes the toilet seat. He reaches back with one hand and pushes open the door so that he can have a view of the front door while he takes a long, luxuriant PISS. He seems to really be enjoying himself.

He sees a little gold Buddha on the back of the toilet. He stares at it.

Is this religious icon working on his conscience?

Nope. He plops the baby Buddha in the toilet and FLUSHES it.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

With his back to her, Brett uses his zip-tied hands to HOIST Michelle up to the little window at the top of the shower.

Michelle SLIDES the glass pane up, PROPS it open with a bottle of shampoo.

She KNOCKS out the screen. They're overjoyed when they HEAR it LAND on the balcony outside.

MICHELLE
Okay, push me up, babe.

BRETT
I am. You gotta climb.

MICHELLE
I am.

They work at it and she gets a third of the way out the window which is enough to know that this plan isn't going to work. She doesn't fit.

BRETT
We should've measured it.

MICHELLE
You should've measured --

Michelle SLIPS off Brett's hands. She's FALLING --

With his hands still bound, Brett somehow manages to sort of SHOVE Michelle into the corner before she hits the floor. It muffles the FALL and the NOISE.

They look at each other, worried.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Did he hear us?

INT. DEN - HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

The gunman riffles through Brett's desk, putting valuables in a file box he carries.

Then he sees an award statue in a glass case across the room. It sits atop a pompous little podium.

He can't figure out how to get inside the glass case so he BREAKS IT with the hilt of his gun, careful to shield his eyes from the FLYING GLASS.

He picks up the statue like it may be something of real value, but then he reads the plaque aloud --

GUNMAN

*To Brett Hardwick for "The Groom"
from Mavern, the studio that brings
you the "The Groom."*

(sotto)

This ain't no Emmy.

Correct. It's a self aggrandizing award given to the producer of THE GROOM from the production company he owns that produces THE GROOM.

The Gunman drops the worthless statue on the floor and goes back to his box of spoils. This is when he sees something that makes him stop in place --

Three framed posters of THE GROOM hang on the wall, each featuring a different season and a different groom --

Robert: Fireman and Pit Bull Rescuer (season two)

Josh: Millionaire and Little League Coach (season three)

Levon: Ivy League Brain Surgeon and Chef (season four)

The Gunman stands before the wall of posters, reverent and motionless. It's impossible to know what he's thinking.

But then he TAKES OFF his MASK.

In deep concentration, EDDIE ESPERANZA (28) studies the posters, allowing us a long, good look at his face --

And, fuck, if he isn't a handsome mother fucker too. A well-built Latino man with a strong jaw and classic good looks, Esperanza's as handsome as the men featured on the posters.

He stares at "the grooms" wistfully, admiring the rotating stars of the series, and ostensibly, the universe.

Then he MOVES so suddenly, it's startling. Esperanza STRIKES the SAME POSE as Robert the Fireman, complete with boy next door "aw shucks I'm hot" smile.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Brett and Michelle sit on the bathroom floor, defeated.

MICHELLE

It wouldn't have worked anyway. I locked the balcony door earlier. I forgot. I'd just be trapped outside getting cold.

Michelle rubs her wrists. They still have tape all around them, but they're not hooked together.

BRETT

Get these off of me.

Brett turns his back to her. She takes the scissors and starts to GNAW AWAY at his ties.

MICHELLE

Okay, so what's the plan now?

BRETT

As soon as one of us gets the chance we go for the gun safe in the guest room.

MICHELLE

Okay, but I want to be the one to do it. Zero. Nine. One. Seven - then what?

BRETT

Zero. Eight. It's our anniversary date, babe.

Michelle stops, genuinely touched. Her eyes tear up a little.

BRETT (CONT'D)

What? You know I'm a romantic.

Michelle is suddenly overwhelmed with emotion --

MICHELLE

I'm a terrible person.

BRETT

Are you kidding? You're wonderful.

MICHELLE

I've been a terrible wife and just a shitty bad person.

BRETT

Hey, where is this all coming from?
Is it about tonight? I can argue
with the wife part because I'm the
husband and really the only person
who can say if you're a good wife
or not. And I say you're a great
wife, babe.

Michelle smiles weakly. This makes her feel a little better.

BRETT (CONT'D)

And as far as being a bad person
goes...

Here he falters.

MICHELLE

See? I'm bad. You can't even think
of anything to say --

BRETT

Fuck 'em. What does being "good"
mean anyway?

MICHELLE

(re: zip ties)

Lean forward a little, babe. I've
almost got it.

BRETT

So you don't recycle or care about
homeless people, but you cried at
that abused dog commercial,
remember? I had to bring you a box
of Kleenex. You're not terrible,
babe. You're my lady.

He turns around and kisses her, leans his forehead on hers.

BRETT (CONT'D)

You're just having feelings because
this is stressful and nerve-
wracking. But everything's going to
work out great. Trust me.

MICHELLE

Babe? If I told you something --

A LOUD CRASH as the HEAVY WINDOW they propped open in the
shower stall SLAMS SHUT --

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Emulating the brain surgeon's sexy arrogance, Esperanza pretends to hold a stethoscope in one hand as he flips an omelette with the other.

His fun is interrupted by the LOUD THUMPING SOUND from upstairs. Esperanza looks upstairs towards the NOISE.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Michelle and Brett HEAR HEAVY FOOTSTEPS coming.

He doesn't have much time. Brett WRESTLES to PULL his wrists apart -- the weakened zip tie finally gives way. Yes! His hands are free.

MICHELLE

Don't forget to keep them behind
you. Pretend they're still hooked.

The FOOTSTEPS get closer.

Brett puts his hands behind him. Michelle does too, pretending like she's still duct taped to the drawer handle.

Eyes on the door, they brace themselves for impact --

BRETT

Here we go.

The door FLIES open. And Esperanza enters --

Without his mask on.

ESPERANZA

The fuck was that noise?

No one says anything. Michelle and Brett fight the urge to look at each other and confirm that they're seeing what they're seeing.

Esperanza clocks their faces. He knows something's up.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

What?

BRETT

Nothing. We weren't --

But Brett sputters out, not actually saying anything -- he's doing mental math; *is it in his best interest to say something or to not say something...*

But before he can decide, Esperanza CATCHES his own unmasked REFLECTION in the MIRROR.

He looks mad and very disappointed in himself. Now he knows what Brett and Michelle know.

MICHELLE
(damage control)
We'd never tell anyone. I promise.
We won't report any of this --

An angry Esperanza DRAGS Brett up by his collar and PULLS him from the room --

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ADJACENT TO MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Brett scrambles to get his legs under him, but he ends up being more POTATO BAGGED out of the master closet and down the hall than walking on his own volition.

BRETT
Not so rough! Come on!

They take a corner and... THWACK!.. Brett's shoulder takes the FULL HIT of the WALL.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Mother fucker! You dislocated my shoulder. Fuck, man.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Before he left the closet, Esperanza SLAMMED the sliding door closed behind him.

But he left before it actually latched.

It's sliding on the rail fast, but Michelle's faster.

Seizing her opportunity, she RACES for it --

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Esperanza DRAGS Brett into the upstairs hall.

Once they're a few corners away from Michelle, near the top of the stairs, Esperanza drops Brett on the rug.

ESPERANZA
What now, man? She saw my face.

Like two actors getting off stage, they take a second to catch their breath. A worried Esperanza looks to Brett for answers --

BRETT
Don't worry. It's okay.

ESPERANZA
Nah, man. I think she's on to us.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Michelle SPRINTS for the closet door. She's only got seconds.

She TRIPS over a pair of heels and GOES DOWN.

SPRAWLED FLAT on the FLOOR --

She STICKS her arm out like she's sliding to home base --

THROWING her hand between the sliding door and the wall.

Her fingers get HAMMERED, CRUNCHING on impact.

But they STOP the door from closing and latching.

It hurts like a motherfucker -- Michelle SHOVES her duct taped wrist in her mouth to stop from SCREAMING -- but she did it.

With her hands now free (if a little swollen) and the door wide open, Michelle CLIMBS to her feet. She RIPS the excess duct tape from her hands and makes a RUN for it.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Michelle comes around the first corner. Coast is clear. Light as a cat, she hurries down the hall toward the guest bedroom.

INT. GUEST ROOM - DAY

Without the neighbor's motion activated lights, the room is pretty dark.

Michelle SCURRIES to the half open closet door and KNEELS down in front of it. She PULLS the doors open, expecting to lay her hands on the gun safe.

But the GUN SAFE is GONE.

All that is left is a square imprint in the carpet where the gun safe used to be.

Frightened and pale, Michelle looks up.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Michelle comes out of the guest room and HURRIES down the hall. As she passes the main staircase, she hears VOICES rising up from the living room downstairs.

ESPERANZA (O.S.)
-- this just got really fucked up.

BRETT (O.S.)
What? No. Nothing's changed --

Esperanza SCOFFS. Michelle stops dead still, listening.

ESPERANZA (O.S.)
How can you say that? She knows who
I am, man --

CLOSE ON: Michelle's face as she leans in closer to listen--

INT. DEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Esperanza paces, running his hands through this hair. Brett stands, confident and assured.

ESPERANZA
-- She's seen me with the yard crew
hundreds of time.

BRETT
She doesn't look at the gardeners.
She can't tell you guys apart.

ESPERANZA
Racist, man.

BRETT
I didn't mean it like that. I meant
Michelle's in her own world. She
doesn't think about or really even
notice other people. Especially
lower... you know... staff people.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - INTERCUT

CLOSE ON: Michelle's face as she listens to her husband tell a stranger who she is and who she isn't.

INT. DEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Esperanza won't be appeased --

ESPERANZA

She's going to turn me in. You got to tell her what's going on.

BRETT

Look, everything's fine. I got it all worked out.

ESPERANZA

Just tell her it's just for insurance you know. That you hired me and --

BRETT

I got it. Don't worry.

ESPERANZA

I don't want to get arrested.

BRETT

Nobody's getting arrested, man.

Brett motions to calm-down. Esperanza notices that his hands are freed.

ESPERANZA

Your zip ties are cut???

BRETT

Yes, but it's okay --

Esperanza freaks out --

ESPERANZA

Are her ties cut too?

BRETT

Yes, but --

Esperanza pulls the gun from his waistband, worked up.

ESPERANZA

Then how do I know she's not calling 911 right now?! Shit, man.

BRETT

Because you have our phones, okay? Look, she's locked in, sitting on the floor of the bathroom, scared out of her mind. She's not fucking John McClane.

Esperanza doesn't know who that is and Brett is pissing him off. He points the Glock at him, reasserting himself.

ESPERANZA

You are one smug, arrogant dude,
man. I knew you were bad news.

BRETT

Put that thing away --

ESPERANZA

All grinning like a dirty monkey at
the zoo saying anything to make it
all right. Fuck that.

(gets in his face)

You think I'm stupid, Mr. Fucker?

BRETT

Stop waving the gun around, okay?

ESPERANZA

Then stop fucking with me, man! You
got a plan here? Tell me.

There's a long moment here as Brett thinks, calculating his
best move --

BRETT

It doesn't matter if she's seen
your face --

ESPERANZA

To you --

BRETT

To either of us because she's not
going to tell anyone.

ESPERANZA

You don't know that --

BRETT

She's not going to tell anyone
because she's not going to be able
to tell anyone.

ESPERANZA

Huh? What are you saying?

BRETT

Michelle's not getting out of this
house tonight.

ESPERANZA

You saying what I think you're
saying, man?

How explicit does he have to be? Brett fights frustration.

BRETT

If you think I'm saying I'm going
to murder my wife tonight then,
yeah, I'm saying what you think I'm
saying, *man*.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - INTERCUT

ON MICHELLE: hearing these words said aloud. She looks across
the hall at the wall of photos of her and Brett.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARTY HOUSE - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DUSK - FLASHBACK

TITLE CARD: **Chapter Two -- "For Richer, for Poorer."**

Michelle, hair back in a ponytail, wears a white button up
shirt and a wee little bow tie. She walks through the CROWD
with a plate of hors d'oeuvres.

MICHELLE

Excuse me. Watch your back, please.

She weaves through the packed room with real finesse. She's
got an MFA in dodging elbows and glasses of red wine.

BRETT (O.S.)

Got any cocktail weenies on there?

She's annoyed, but *voila...* when she turns around she's got
her professional happy smile plastered on her face.

Brett stands there in a suit and tie, looking very handsome
and very attentive. In a room where everyone's trying to
catch the eye of someone more important, Michelle's not used
to the undivided attention. She likes it.

MICHELLE

No cocktail wienies, but I could
probably scrounge you up some pork
rinds.

BRETT

Mmmm.

(motions to the floor to
ceiling windows and the
patio beyond)

You allowed to go see the view?
'Cuz it's sunset right now and it's
pretty fucking rad.

MICHELLE

Oh, I'm sorry. I can't go anywhere
with anyone who says 'rad.' Sorry.

He smiles. She smiles.

A big MAN clears off Michelle's platter of spring rolls
without even acknowledging her. Reminded that she's invisible
and unimportant, Michelle watches as the big man toddles off--

BRETT

It's his cheat day.

EXT. PARTY HOUSE - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DUSK - FLASHBACK

Michelle and Brett stand on the edge of the patio, watching
the sun set over LA.

BRETT

Never gets old.

MICHELLE

You like LA?

BRETT

Love it!

She looks skeptical.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Look down there -- all those
people, all their dreams --
everybody down there is here for
some reason, some dream that was
bigger than their fear. How can you
not love this town? This is a city
made entirely of dreamers.

MICHELLE

Um... except the natives.

BRETT

Are there any? Really?

MICHELLE

So what's your dream? From your
irrepressible optimism, I'm
guessing eccentric chocolate
factory owner or rocket ship man.

BRETT

Me? I want to be -- happy.
Ridiculously, every day,
deliriously happy.

This is strangely profound and not the answer Michelle was expecting.

MICHELLE

I got to get more canapes.

She walk aways, then turns around, inspired.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Hey?

Brett takes his eyes off the sunset for her.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I want your number.

BRETT

Yes!

INT. WEDDING VENUE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The floor is cleared for the first dance. Michelle and Brett take center stage.

MICHELLE

(under her breath)

Ready?

BRETT

You bet.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

I introduce to you Mr. and Mrs.
Hardwick!

GROVER WASHINGTON JR.'S "JUST THE TWO OF US" starts up and Brett and Michelle begin to dance as the CROWD CLAPS.

MICHELLE

You should have to blow a blood
alcohol level before you get to
make a wedding toast.

BRETT

You talking about your mom or Jake?

MICHELLE

Both. By the way, who's brilliant
idea was it to have "The Groom"
make his own toast? Couldn't
someone have written him something
to say?

BRETT

Guy's a cash cow. He can make a long, drunk, unfunny toast at my wedding all day long. We rich, baby.

MICHELLE

I wish we'd picked a different song. You know what I wanted.

BRETT

"Close My Eyes Forever" Ozzy Osborne and Lita Ford?

MICHELLE

Yep. Or that Calliou song.

BRETT

Another good choice.

MICHELLE

I want more cake.

He twirls her.

BRETT

I put dibbs on the third tier.
We're taking that shit to the hotel room.

She smiles at him, completely in love.

EXT. MACHU PICCHU - DAY - FLASHBACK

Brett stands dangerously close to the ledge. Michelle takes a picture of him.

BRETT

I look good?

She shrugs.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Take another.

He strikes the same pose, like he's going to eat the world.
Michelle takes the picture.

MICHELLE

This one's hot.

Brett comes over and looks at it.

BRETT
Boom! Post it.

They kiss. Michelle sneaks a picture of them kissing to post later.

MICHELLE
Happy anniversary, babe.

He swoops her up in his arms and YELLS, king of the world --

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

-- his YELL cuts off so abruptly that the silence is deafening. You can hear the FURNACE kicking on and the SURF in the far distance.

Michelle takes her eyes off photos of them in Machu Picchu and them at their wedding and them doing fucking everything together for the past eleven years. She presses on her eyes with her palms.

And takes a big breath. *She's got to keep her shit together.*

VOICES drift up from below --

INT. DEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Brett paces.

BRETT
Michelle's not going to turn you in because Michelle's going to be dead. There. Okay? That's the plan. I told you not to worry about it.

Everything is quiet. Then the outside sprinklers come on. RAP-TAP-TAPPING on the window when they rotate past.

ESPERANZA
Fuck. That's dark.

BRETT
I'm going to do it after you're long gone. Then I'll call the cops and give them a description of the intruder and I'll say he's like five foot eight and Asian. Maybe I'll say he spoke with a thick Malaysian accent.
(misreading Esperanza's incredulous look)
I've got a good ear for accents. They'll believe me.
(MORE)

BRETT (CONT'D)

(back on track)

All they'll know is that there really was someone here in the house -- they'll see your bootprints and our bruises -- and they'll know that it wasn't me. Case closed. My wife was killed by a masked intruder.

(pause)

Who I think was Asian and had a thick Malaysian accent.

A beat as Esperanza thinks it over. Then with certainty --

ESPERANZA

Nope. Fuck this. I'm outta here.

Esperanza turns and starts to WALK OUT of the house --

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - INTERCUT

CLOSE ON: Michelle looks panicked.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Brett goes after Esperanza --

BRETT

Wait! Hear me out --

ESPERANZA

I don't like your wife, but I'm not down with killing her.

Esperanza drops the file box in the foyer and opens the door.

Brett turns on his salesman mode. There's not much difference between him and the guy at a used car lot in Van Nuys -- he's desperate and improvising and somehow managing to sell it.

BRETT

That's why I didn't tell you in the first place, okay? I don't want you to be part of it, Esperanza. I want you to have no part in it.

ESPERANZA

But when you say, 'a masked gunman did this,' I'm that masked gunman. If it ever came back to me, I'm the one going down for it. No way, man. I'm an actor.

Brett tries to look earnest and baffled.

BRETT

I would never let you take the fall
for it.

ESPERANZA

You absolutely would.

Esperanza opens the front door.

BRETT

Wait, Esperanza!

Brett closes the door and this pisses Esperanza off.

BRETT (CONT'D)

What can I offer you to finish this
up? We just got to go empty the
safe and then you can go, okay? The
safe's got all the truly valuable
stuff that I need stolen and out of
the house, okay? So let's just go
empty it?

(beat)

Then your part's done. You can go.

The SPRINKLERS RAP-TAP-TAP along the bay window again.

ESPERANZA

You over water your cacti.

BRETT

You want more money? I have more
money. I'll double your price.
Triple it. How about forty
thousand? It's right upstairs in
the safe. Let's just go get it.

(a beat)

Come on.

On Esperanza, thinking, slowly coming around. Brett should
just stay quiet and wait, but he's the type that can't help
but try to seal the deal --

BRETT (CONT'D)

More money than you've seen in your
entire life, man.

This sets Esperanza off --

ESPERANZA

You don't know that. That's another
racist assumption. My dad was an
orthodontist!

BRETT

Oh, okay. Sorry. My bad.

ESPERANZA

You've lied to me. I can't trust you. Fuck you.

BRETT

How about I help you carry the stuff out? Then you can just go. Let's just go empty the safe and --

ESPERANZA

No, fuck that. I'm changing the plan.

BRETT

What does that mean?

Esperanza PULLS a pair of hand cuffs out of his back pack and before Brett knows what's happening -- he HOOKS one to Brett's hand.

Fear flashes in Brett's eyes. For the first time tonight, he looks genuinely terrified.

BRETT (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Stop!

Esperanza KICKS Brett's legs out from under him, DROPPING him to the ground.

He HOOKS the other handcuff to the leg of the oak desk, trapping Brett.

BRETT (CONT'D)

What is this? No. Don't do this!
What the fuck?!

Leaving him handcuffed to the desk, Esperanza heads upstairs.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Esperanza climbs the stairs two at a time. He checks out "The Groom" poster from season one. Suddenly, he gets an idea.

ESPERANZA

(sotto)

NASA Astronaut and Olympian.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Esperanza arrives in the upstairs hallway. We're half scared he's going to catch Michelle sitting there listening --

But she's gone. The hallway is clear.

Esperanza BARRELS on toward the master bedroom.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Esperanza goes to unlock the closet door. He's surprised to find it unlocked.

He ROLLS the door back carefully, on high alert --

But Michelle sits on the bathroom floor right where he left her.

She's got her hands behind her back, pretending they're still taped to the drawers.

ESPERANZA

You know the combo to the safe?

She nods. Esperanza SCOOTs down next to Michelle. They both know that the duct tape is already off.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

You do this?

MICHELLE

I'm sorry.

ESPERANZA

Come on.

He pulls her up, gentler than he's been and leads her --

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

-- into the master bedroom.

ESPERANZA

Where's the safe?

Michelle points to a painting on the far wall.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

Okay. Open it.

Michelle SWINGS the landscape painting aside. Behind it is a wall safe with a brass plated dial.

Michelle enters the numbers, but she messes up and has to stop and start over.

MICHELLE

Sorry. I'm shaking.

Esperanza waits as she enters the numbers. A CLICK deep inside the safe, and the door SPRINGS open.

ESPERANZA

Step back.

Michelle steps aside. Esperanza roots around in the safe. He PULLS out a stack of cash. He tries to contain his excitement -- *he actually has never seen this much money in cash before.*

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

(to Michelle)

You got a bag or something I can use --?

MICHELLE

Sure.

Michelle goes toward the master closet. Stops.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Is it okay if I go in here --

ESPERANZA

Yeah. Whatever.

Michelle comes back with an empty Lululemon bag.

MICHELLE

It's Esperanza, right? I always try to remember people's names. I was a caterer for years and a waitress. So I know what it's like to be treated like you're invisible.

He scoffs. She's trying too hard to bond. Esperanza shoves the bag at her and motions with the gun.

ESPERANZA

Load it up. Don't leave anything out.

Michelle FILLS the bag with the contents of the safe -- jewelry, cash, the will.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

Not the paperwork. I don't want that crap.

MICHELLE

Oh, okay, sure.

She starts to separate the contents. Papers stay in, JEWELRY BOXES and CASH come out. She comes to a stack of bonds. Confused what to do --

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Do you want these in or out?

ESPERANZA
What are they?

MICHELLE
Bonds.

ESPERANZA
What's that?

MICHELLE
You know I don't really know.

She LAUGHS. Tries to stop, but now that she's started, she's finding it hard to reel it in. She just keeps LAUGHING.

ESPERANZA
Knock it off.

MICHELLE
I'm sorry.
(puts her hand in her
mouth)
It's nerves.

Esperanza looks at her like she's crazy. He doesn't know what to do. Michelle sits down cross legged on the rug and fans her face.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Sorry. I've just got to calm down.

But she's still laughing and now crying too. She's a hot mess.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
It's been a long night. I'm sorry.

ESPERANZA
You done?

MICHELLE
Just a second.

ESPERANZA
It's a chick thing.

MICHELLE
You got a girlfriend?

ESPERANZA
I'm not talking about it.

MICHELLE
You do. I bet she's pretty.

ESPERANZA
Don't.

MICHELLE
What?

ESPERANZA
You don't have to be fake.

MICHELLE
I'm not being fake --

ESPERANZA
He's going to kill you.

Michelle's got to play act like she's surprised.

MICHELLE
What?

ESPERANZA
Brett.

MICHELLE
You kidding?

ESPERANZA
No.

Is he buying her acting?

MICHELLE
Oh my God.

ESPERANZA
I can make that not happen --

He's buying it.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)
But you got to give me something.

Michelle suppresses a real shudder, not acting anymore.

MICHELLE
(worried)
What?

He almost doesn't want to say it. But he finally mans up and asks --

ESPERANZA
You got any say on who becomes "The Groom?"

Michelle's eyes light up, relieved. She nods enthusiastically.

MICHELLE
Yes. Yes, I do.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Handcuffed to the desk, Brett tries to lift it and slide his handcuffed wrist out from under.

But he can't lift the whole desk with one arm which is what he'd have to do in order to slide the handcuffed hand out from under the leg. He's stuck.

BRETT
Fuck. This is bad.

Outside, through the sliding glass kitchen door, he sees the green glow-in-the-dark alien sticker.

Brett looks closer, SQUINTING -- the gun safe is outside on top of a pile of miscellaneous valuables Esperanza has collected from around the house. This is Esperanza's take away pile. And Brett's got to get to it.

Brett thinks, realizing something --

He can't lift the desk, but he can maybe slide it.

A hand on each desk leg, Brett SHOVES using the power of his legs to move it. The desk begrudgingly MOVES.

Brett looks hopeful: *it's not going to be speedy, but it'll get the job done.*

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michelle's regained her composure.

MICHELLE
I'm an executive producer.

ESPERANZA

At Mavern?

MICHELLE

Yes, at Mavern. I can have a say in who gets cast. I've never got in there, but I have the right too. Absolutely.

ESPERANZA

So, you think I'm handsome enough?

MICHELLE

For sure.

ESPERANZA

Yeah?

MICHELLE

Yes. You've got a nice strong jaw.

ESPERANZA

Fuck. You're just saying all this 'cuz of the situation.

MICHELLE

No way! When you used to work in the yard, I thought it.

It came out like flirting which she didn't intend. It's made both of them uncomfortable.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

(recovering)

We'll have to round out your story a bit you know --

ESPERANZA

Huh?

MICHELLE

You know -- give you something distinctive. Like we could make you the owner of the landscaping business. Call you an "entrepreneur."

ESPERANZA

But I'm not the owner.

MICHELLE

I know that. It's all kind of half truths.

ESPERANZA

What is?

MICHELLE

Um... the show. The "grooms"?

Esperanza looks confused. A phone RINGS. He pulls Michelle and Brett's cell phones from his pocket but they're not ringing.

He tosses them in the Lululemon bag and opens his back pack.

It's his phone that's RINGING. He checks out the caller ID and then answers. Michelle eyes his gun, left unattended.

ESPERANZA

Yeah?

(listens)

Give me a minute.

Michelle inches her hand toward the Glock. Esperanza grabs Michelle's arm not noticing how dangerously close she's come to grabbing the gun --

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

Come with me.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Esperanza pushes Michelle back in the bathroom and LOCKS the sliding wood door.

Frustrated and jacked on adrenaline, Michelle SMASHES a jar of face cream in the sink.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Brett, flushed, his brow covered in sweat has PUSHED the oak desk out of the den and into the spacious kitchen.

His progress is kind of amazing and he looks at how far he's come, proud of himself.

Just a little bit further to go.

Brett starts at it, HEAVING the two desk legs out in front of him. Crawling along behind, doing something like mountain climbers, he uses his legs to PUSH the desk along the tile floor.

Then he hears a GUN COCKING near his ear --

ESPERANZA

What the fuck are you doing?

Esperanza has snuck up on him.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Esperanza throws Brett into the bathroom with Michelle. And closes the closet door with a SLAM and LOCKS it.

Michelle strains to listen, but she can't hear his footsteps receding.

BRETT
Slight wrinkle --

Michelle puts her finger to her lips, silently shushing him. She points to the door. Cups her ear. *He's listening to us.*

Brett nods. He gets it.

BRETT (CONT'D)
(loud; for show)
I'm going to help him load
everything in his car and then
he'll be gone.

Fuck. Can she really trust anything Brett's telling her? Brett looks like he's scared, but is he just pretending.

Unsure if Esperanza's within earshot or not, Michelle plays along.

MICHELLE
Great.

Then they hear HEAVY THINGS MOVING down below in the kitchen. They can speak freely.

BRETT
Fuck, he's so loud. The neighbor's
going to hear him.

MICHELLE
Powalski?

BRETT
We'll find out the guy's an arms
dealer with a Rambo complex. He's
going to come out shooting a flame
thrower.

He's funny. Her husband. Michelle looks sad. She tears up.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Babe, what is it?

She shakes her head. She can't.

BRETT (CONT'D)
It's been a long night, huh?
(then)
It's almost over now.

This has a heavy connotation for Michelle.

MICHELLE
The gun safe in the guest room is gone.

BRETT
I know. I saw it outside by the sliding door. He's got it stacked with all the other stuff he's taking.

MICHELLE
You tell him about it?

BRETT
About what?

MICHELLE
The gun safe.

BRETT
No.

MICHELLE
Then how did he know about it?

BRETT
I don't know. He probably saw it.

Michelle doesn't look convinced.

BRETT (CONT'D)
What? Am I that good of an actor?

Ever the optimist, Brett plugs ahead --

BRETT (CONT'D)
So here's what we're going to do -- when he comes back, I'll wrestle him to the ground and you grab his gun.

MICHELLE
I don't like that plan.

BRETT

Alternately, I can wrestle him. You can run down the stairs through the whole house, go outside, open the gun safe, run back in, and come all the way back up here. Let's just hope I'm still alive.

MICHELLE

You remember the beetroot chocolate cake?

BRETT

What?

MICHELLE

From our wedding?

BRETT

Of course. It was fucking delicious. Why are you thinking of that now?

MICHELLE

I don't know.

(beat)

Why don't we eat dessert anymore?

BRETT

Carbs?

MICHELLE

I'm serious.

BRETT

I was being serious. I don't know. Hey, are you okay? You sure you're up to this?

MICHELLE

Yes.

She knows she shouldn't. She tries to stop herself. But she can't hold her tongue --

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I know you saw a divorce lawyer.

BRETT

What?

MICHELLE

Don't lie. Hamm and Guilford? Their number showed up on the cell phone bill. A lot.

Brett starts laughing.

BRETT

You're right. I did call them. A lot. For research. Jesus, Michelle. We're thinking of doing a new show called "The Divorcee."

MICHELLE

Bullshit.

BRETT

I told you about it.

MICHELLE

You did not.

BRETT

You're having white wine amnesia.

MICHELLE

Don't be a prick. Own it. You want to divorce me. You want to leave me with nothing. You want to send me back to some shitty little hole in North Hollywood --

BRETT

No, where is all of this --

MICHELLE

Then why do we still have the pre-nup? It's right out there in the safe. Let's just go rip it up. Right now. It would just make everything better --

BRETT

You know what I love about you? You're beautiful and unpredictable and fun. But fuck if you aren't a gaping, unfillable hole of insecurity. It's been eleven years. How long is it going to take for you to know I love you?

She doesn't know if she should believe him or not.

BRETT (CONT'D)
I'm all in. For richer and poorer.
 In sickness and health. All of it,
 okay?

He's convincing her, but then he goes and pushes it too far.

BRETT (CONT'D)
 Til death do us part.

Michelle's eyes narrow, suspicious. They hear Esperanza's heavy FOOTSTEPS coming towards them.

BRETT (CONT'D)
 We good?
 (beat)
 Michelle? We going to do this?

Making up her mind --

MICHELLE
 Yes. Let's do it.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ADJACENT TO MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Esperanza unlocks the closet door and slides it open. It's only open a foot or two when --

Brett ATTACKS.

Like an unsuspecting quarterback being SACKED by an offensive lineman, Esperanza FLIES backward --

And HITS the floor of the master bedroom --

Everything in his hands goes FLYING.

In the dark room, it's hard to see if there was a gun or not.

Michelle SCRAMBLES around, searching for the missing gun --

Meanwhile, Brett climbs atop Esperanza, taking pleasure in PUMMELING him.

Michelle can't find the fucking gun anywhere.

Was it ever even here?

Esperanza grabs Brett's face, TWISTING his jaw.

BRETT
 Get the gun, Michelle!

She CRAWLS around the bed, pawing the carpet. No gun.

MICHELLE
It's not here!

Locked in a life and death fight, Brett looks at Michelle.
And she looks at him. They're both panicked.

Plan B time.

Without having to say a word to each other, Michelle gets up
and takes off RUNNING as fast as she can for the gun safe --

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Michelle RUNS toward the stairs. She's running so fast she
KNOCKS into things, CLIPS corners.

Picture frames SMASH to the floor in her wake.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Michelle FLIES down the stairs.

As she WHIPS by "The Groom" poster, it blows back to center.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Michelle RACES for the sliding glass door --

SCOOTING around the oak desk that is inexplicably in the
center of the kitchen, she SLIDES the glass door open so hard
it REBOUNDS on her --

EXT. PATIO - HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Michelle PAWS through the pile of loot -- jewelry and cuff-
links and silver letter openers --

She finds the GUN SAFE.

Her hands SHAKE. She PLUGS in the numbers --

MICHELLE
Zero. Nine. One. Seven. Zero.
Eight.

The gun safe POPS open --

Michelle is elated and flooded with relief.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Still FIGHTING, Brett and Esperanza come CRASHING down the
stairs.

"The Groom" poster is KNOCKED off the wall and over the railing.

It EXPLODES on impact.

GLASS SHARDS fly everywhere.

Brett and Esperanza ROLL to the bottom of the staircase.

Brett gets his legs under him first.

He GRABS Esperanza's head and SMASHES it hard on the banister.

This pisses Esperanza off. He rears like a RAM and --

CLOBBERS Brett into the wall, making a Brett sized hole. Plaster crumbles, showering them both with powder.

Michelle RUNS into the room --

MICHELLE

Stop!

SKIDDING to a stop in her bare feet, **she has a Colt 38 pointed at them.**

Without thinking, Esperanza SWATS it out of her hands.

And the GUN goes SKITTERING

Across the floor

SPINNING

Up for grabs

It comes to a stop near

BRETT

With lightning fast reflexes, he LUNGES for it.

But Michelle is right there too. She lies her hand on his, GRIPPING like a vise.

Brett looks at her. She looks at him. Steely.

Esperanza's almost there, ready to throw his big, meaty paw in the mix too.

Brett and Michelle LOCK eyes.

His say, "give it to me."

Hers say, "I'm not letting go."

Brett relents and releases hold, letting Michelle come up with the GUN.

Michelle holds it out in front of her in the general direction of both Esperanza and Brett.

She's twitchy, on high alert for any quick movements.

Esperanza, realizing the seriousness of the situation, PUTS his hands up in the air.

ESPERANZA

Don't shoot me. This was all his idea. I'm just an actor.

BRETT

You just tried to legit kill me.

ESPERANZA

You attacked me first.

BRETT

Yeah 'cuz you handcuffed me to my desk -- and dislocated my shoulder--

MICHELLE

Brett, stop. I want to hear what he has to say.

Brett falls back.

ESPERANZA

This all started a couple of months back. I had an audition for Brett's show --

BRETT

(interjects)

For a waiter on the special date weekend.

ESPERANZA

He remembered I used to work on your yard.

BRETT

Can I butt in here? I want to clarify this sequence of events--

MICHELLE

God damnit, Brett! Let him talk.

Brett looks stung by the tone of Michelle's voice. He throws his hands up in the air, exasperated.

ESPERANZA

A few weeks later he calls and says he wants to get a drink. I didn't think anything of it you know --

BRETT

He didn't get the role by the way. He stared straight into the lens. Real professional.

(to Esperanza)

UCB should refund your money.

ESPERANZA

-- At drinks, he says he has a job for me. And that's where it started. He told me about the pre-nup you made him sign and how he's short on cash --

MICHELLE

Well, he lied. He's the one made me sign a pre-nup. A long one.

BRETT

It was the Mavern lawyers, Michelle! I told you --

MICHELLE

You own Mavern, asshole!

Brett looks at Michelle, surprised at her vitriol. *Is she acting or is she actually upset with him?*

ESPERANZA

(to Michelle)

But you're a boss there too, right?

BRETT

Michelle?!

(scoffs)

No way.

ESPERANZA

(to Michelle)

But you said you were the corporate producer. You said you could help me --

MICHELLE

I can.

BRETT

With what? Michelle, what's going on? When were you two talking?

MICHELLE

I want to hear the rest of Esperanza's story. Go on. You were having drinks with my husband...

ESPERANZA

Um... okay... that's where he hired me to come here tonight and break in your home and steal things -- he said it was for insurance.

BRETT

That part is true.

ESPERANZA

But then tonight I find out that all of this, the break in, the robbery, the duct tape, and zip ties and whatever -- it's all so that he can kill you.

Michelle likes how the GUN feels in her hand. She AIMS it at Esperanza and then Brett. She likes the fear in their eyes.

BRETT

I told him that, but you know why.

ESPERANZA

(confused)

Why?

Michelle looks at Brett. Steely. It's unnerving. He starts feeling uncomfortable.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

Why? Someone tell me.

But Michelle holds eye contact with Brett. She doesn't blink, doesn't give an inch. Brett starts to sweat.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

What the hell's going on here?

BRETT

You're not doubting me, are you, babe?

MICHELLE

You sounded pretty fucking convincing, babe.

ESPERANZA

He set this all up to get away with murder -- your murder. But I stopped his plan. I saved your life. And we got our own deal now, right?

BRETT

Um? What deal? What's he talking about, Michelle?

ESPERANZA

-- I did my part and now... you've got the gun now, Mrs. Hardwick. You got the power. He doesn't.

BRETT

Michelle? You're kind of freaking me out --

As Brett and Esperanza have been campaigning, speaking over each other, Michelle's calmed down --

Calmed down so much, that it's almost as if something inside her has been turned off completely.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Michelle? Babe? Look at me.

ESPERANZA

Everything I've told you is the truth. You got to believe me, Mrs. Hardwick.

She looks him square in the eye.

MICHELLE

I believe you. Sorry.

Then Michelle PULLS the TRIGGER --

It's LOUD and fucking jarring as hell

-- she SHOOTS Esperanza.

And he FALLS to the cold tile floor. Dead.

And then there's a moment where there's no sound and where nothing moves -- except the PLUME of smoke coming from Michelle's gun.

The world's on pause. The whole world has stopped rotating.

And then, inconceivably, Michelle, shaky and full of flooded with endorphins, laughs.

A mist of blood splatter speckles her night shirt and her face almost like summer freckles, but it doesn't bother Michelle. Endorphins course through her veins, flooding her.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Holy shit. Wow.

She shakes off energy, jogging in a little circle, attempting to discharge some of her super-charged energy.

Brett watches her. He looks thrilled that she's happy.

He puts a hand up in the air.

For a second it looks weird. His arm outstretched up in the air. *What the heck is he doing?*

But then, incredibly, Michelle HIGH FIVES him.

BRETT

Happy anniversary, babe.

He smiles. She smiles back. And they kiss.

Then the entire evening REWINDS --

EXT. MALIBU HILLS - NIGHT

In a stylized, REVERSE TIME LAPSE, the fog thins and LIFTS and ROLLS back out to the ocean.

The LIGHTS in the houses on the Malibu hillside COME BACK ON to an earlier and simpler part of the evening when people were walking dogs and watching TV. Porch LIGHTS and living room LIGHTS and LAMPS -- FLICK on all over the dark hill like little kernels of popcorn popping.

The MOON in the sky jogs backward across the night sky from west to east.

Then, just as abruptly as it started, the REWINDING stops and our evening begins to play forward again in real time.

EXT. ROAD - MALIBU HILLS - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: **Chapter Three: "'Til Death Do Us Part"**

An orange Nova drives up the road toward the HARDWICKS' gated house.

INT. NOVA - NIGHT

Esperanza drives. He points to the Hardwick's house as it comes into view.

ESPERANZA

That's the one.

He's not alone in the car -- GREG BAXTER (28) sits in the passenger seat. Like Hannibal Buress, Greg is a nerdy, stocky, black guy with glasses. He's got his name stenciled on his blue work shirt.

GREG

Wow.

Esperanza parks in a dirt turnout and turns off the ignition. They sit in silence for a minute.

ESPERANZA

Oh, check this out.

Esperanza shows Greg 10,000 dollars in cash he's been keeping under the driver's seat.

GREG

Jesus. You should really put that in the bank. Buy bonds or something.

ESPERANZA

This is only half of it. I get the rest after.

GREG

But think about it -- isn't half for doing nothing -- better than all of it for doing something dangerous and stupid?

ESPERANZA

No, 'cuz it'd only be half. And it's not dangerous or stupid. It's just a job.

GREG

Got to be the weirdest acting job I ever heard of, man. Why can't he just tell his wife what he's doing?

ESPERANZA

He doesn't want her to know he's having money troubles.

GREG

I feel bad for her. Can you imagine how scared she's going to be waking up with you all standing there looking like the fucking Night Stalker? Fuck. Not cool.

ESPERANZA

Don't feel bad for her. She's a terrible person.

(off Greg's look)

I ever tell you what she did to me? I was working in the yard and I had to pee real bad, right? I didn't just want to go in the bushes 'cuz like what if she saw me. And I didn't want to go hide somewhere and have her find me with like my dick in my hand.

GREG

Yeah?

ESPERANZA

So, I'm like I'm a person, she's a person, I'm just going to go to the front door and knock and ask if I can come in and use her toilet please. So I do. And she says no.

Greg nods, waiting for more.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

She says there's a gas station down on PCH. She says go down there.

Greg's not as offended on Esperanza's behalf as Esperanza wants him to be.

GREG

Sounds like you still got some emotion around this, Eddie --

ESPERANZA

No, I'm just saying the toilet was right there! I could literally see it from the front door -- stupid little Buddha on it. She's just a bad person, man.

Long pause. The night's super quiet.

GREG

I don't get why he can't just leave all his valuables out in a box for you?

ESPERANZA

It's got to look legit. Insurance investigators are super smart.

GREG

Hmmm. Something just doesn't seem right. You should back out, Eddie --

ESPERANZA

I can't. This guy's kind of a big deal. I think tonight's sort of an audition.

GREG

You didn't say that! Year one at UCB and look at all the work you're up for. Taco Bell manager? You got a callback. Gang member four? You almost got a line. It's incredible. Seriously, Eddie. Good job. So what's this one for? A commercial or something?

ESPERANZA

(evading)

Nah, a show. One of those reality ones I think.

GREG

Which one? I watch all of them. "Survivor?" That's the best one by a mile.

ESPERANZA

I think it's called "The Groom."

GREG

Oh, shit! I love that one. "*Jake: NASA astronaut* --

ESPERANZA AND GREG

-- *and Olympian.*"

Esperanza's waiting for Greg to make fun of him, but he doesn't.

GREG

You'd make a cool groom, man. It's time they cast a Latino. We got to get an Ortiz in the White House.

Fist bump. Greg is energized now.

GREG (CONT'D)

Okay, so how can I help? Want to improv? Get into character?

ESPERANZA

Nah, just be my back up. Stay here and you know if I'm not back by --
(checks his watch)
-- like three a.m. just check on me or something, okay?

GREG

You got it.

ESPERANZA

Shit. It's time. I got to get inside.

GREG

Hey, take that resentment at the lady for not letting you use her toilet. Take that and use it. Channel that anger into your character.

ESPERANZA

Okay.

GREG

You're a heartless home invader.

ESPERANZA

Okay.

GREG

Fuck that lady. And fuck her baby Buddha.

Esperanza grabs a black back pack from the back seat.

GREG (CONT'D)

What's that?

ESPERANZA

Duct tape, gloves, a gun and shit.

GREG
(not okay)
Oh.

ESPERANZA
Wish me luck, man.

They fist bump again in a half-ironic way. Then Esperanza exits the car and runs across the road to the pedestrian gate. He opens it and disappears into the yard.

A worried Greg sits in the car, watching him until he's gone.

He looks around anxiously. It's very dark here in Malibu.

Down the road, headlights come around the bend. Greg ducks down in his seat.

And the Hardwick's Tesla drives past him.

The gate ROLLS OPEN and Brett pulls into the driveway. Greg HEARS the distorted words of "GUILTY" playing in the car.

BARBRA STREISAND AND BARRY GIBB
*"Our love is one in a million --
Eyes can see that we got a highway
to the sky --"*

As soon as their car is out of sight, Greg pops his head up.

TIME LAPSE: the fog ROLLS in. And the house lights on the hill GO OFF one by one as the evening gets later and later.

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE/INT. NOVA - NIGHT

Greg, his eyes sort of glazed over with boredom and fatigue, plays games on his phone as he watches the Hardwick's house.

He fights off a yawn. He scratches an itch.

But then he hears a loud NOISE from the house. A THUD. A window SLAMMING? Greg strains to hear more but there's only silence. He checks his watch: **2:19.**

Should he be worried?

CUT TO:

LATER:

Greg wakes with a start. He fell asleep. *What happened?* He checks the time: **3:07.**

Anxious and ready to go, he texts Esperanza -- **Everything ok in there?** He grows impatient. Calls Esperanza.

ESPERANZA (O.S.)

Yeah?

GREG

It's me. What's going on in there?
You okay?

ESPERANZA (O.S.)

Give me a minute.

Greg stays on the phone listening as there's FOOTSTEPS, and FABRIC MOVING, WOOD DOORS SLIDING SHUT and DEADBOLTS LOCKING.

ESPERANZA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Okay, man. I'm back.

GREG

Everything okay?

ESPERANZA (O.S.)

You'll never believe it.

(beat)

I'm going to be the new "Groom."

GREG

What?! That's fantastic! You aced it.

ESPERANZA (O.S.)

Deal making, man.

GREG

I'm so proud of you. Well done.

ESPERANZA (O.S.)

Okay, I got to go. Give me ten minutes and I'll be out.

Greg hangs up.

MINUTES LATER:

Greg stares off in space when a COYOTE crosses the road. It stops in the middle of the road, staring off in space too. Then it locks eyes with Greg. A chill goes down his spine.

NOISES come from the house. RUNNING. VOICES. A SLIDING GLASS DOOR SLAMMING SHUT.

Greg sits up. The coyote TAKES OFF and Greg's commune with nature ends.

Greg looks around, suddenly feeling very exposed out here in the janky Nova. Making up his mind, he gets out of the car and walks toward the Hardwick's house --

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Greg gets to the pedestrian gate. Finds it locked. *Fuck*. He's nervous, but he CLIMBS the fence, officially trespassing now.

Greg walks on the trail of crushed shells to the back of the house. His FOOTSTEPS sound THUNDEROUS to him. Greg opts to walk on the dirt on the side of the trail. It's much quieter.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

Greg comes around the side of the house. It's very dark back here.

GREG
(whispering)
Eddie?

As he gets closer to the sliding glass doors off the kitchen, he sees the pile of loot stacked back here. In the dark, his eyes focus in on the glow-in-the-dark alien sticker. It takes him a second to realize it's on an OPEN GUN SAFE --

This is when Greg looks through the sliding glass door and sees the strange tableau inside the house--

Michelle, dressed only in a nightshirt, has a gun pointed at Esperanza who is pleading for his life --

ESPERANZA
-- I did my part and now... you've got the gun now, Mrs. Hardwick. You got the power. He doesn't.

BRETT
Michelle? You're kind of freaking me out --

Greg's scared -- by the situation but also by the impenetrable and icy expression on Michelle's face.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Michelle? Babe? Look at me.

Greg SEARCHES his pockets for his phone but he doesn't have it. It's in the car.

GREG
(sotto)
Shit.

ESPERANZA

Everything I've told you is true.
You got to believe me, Mrs.
Hardwick.

MICHELLE

I believe you. Sorry.

Michelle pulls the TRIGGER.

It's LOUD and fucking JARRING as hell.

Recoiling in horror, Greg DIVES out of sight. He listens,
breath jagged, scared out of his mind.

Everything is PIN DROP QUIET.

Greg's breath feels so LOUD he's sure they can hear him
inside.

Have they already heard him? Are coming for him? Panic grips
him.

But then Greg HEARS Michelle LAUGH, high on endorphins --

MICHELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Holy shit. Wow.

He HEARS some RUNNING AROUND and then what SOUNDS like a HIGH
FIVE.

BRETT (O.S.)

Happy anniversary, babe.

Greg hears Brett and Michelle KISS --

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

BRETT

Better than Machu Picchu?

MICHELLE

Fuck Machu Picchu. This is the best
anniversary ever. I'm still
shaking.

BRETT

There were, swear to God, about ten
times tonight when I didn't know if
it was all going to work out.

MICHELLE

Me too. And when you were talking
to him? I actually got worried.

BRETT

I was just saying whatever I could think of to get him to stay -- I kept hoping you'd come down with the gun.

MICHELLE

You were very convincing. I almost believed you.

BRETT

Ha. That would've been a double twist.

MICHELLE

Ha.

BRETT

Should I call 911?

MICHELLE

No. Wait. Just give me a second. I want to enjoy this.

But her good mood is turning somber --

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

Greg looks up from his hiding place and assesses the situation. *It's not great.* He has to run back across the patio -- right in front of the glass doors -- in order to get away.

Fuck.

With no choice, Greg silently counts to three and makes a RUN for it.

But he TRIPS --

Over the Lululemon bag full of cash and FALLS face first.

He lies there on the ground. *Did they hear him?*

He's got to know.

Mustering his nerve, Greg turns his head to the side and --

Looks up at the house --

Michelle comes to the glass door, gun in her hand. She looks outside, searching the dark patio and wild hillside behind the house.

But it's so dark out, she's partially blinded by her own reflection in the nighttime window.

She doesn't see Greg lying on the ground a few feet away.

Greg swallows hard, lying as flat and still as he can, not moving.

Then two things happen simultaneously --

One, Michelle turns around to go and --

Two, a hillside coyote activates Powalski's LIGHTS and they KICK ON.

Now it's bright as fucking daylight back here.

And Michelle sees Greg lying on the patio literally right in front of her.

And Greg sees her see him.

The gig's up.

It's hard to tell who's more shocked to see the other.

Michelle fumbles with the gun, aims it at Greg and SHOOTS --

The glass door SHATTERS and GLASS FLIES everywhere.

Shaking with fear, Greg stumbles to his feet and TAKES OFF like a jack rabbit.

BRETT

What the hell, Michelle?!

MICHELLE

There's some guy here.

(then)

Grab a knife!

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Greg RUNS down the trail to the pedestrian gate.

A barefoot maniac in hot pursuit, he hears Michelle's FEET POUNDING on the crushed shells behind him.

MICHELLE

(over her shoulder; to
Brett)

Hurry up, babe! Cut him off at the gate!

Greg's going to get cornered.

Fuck.

And just like that, like some miracle, or act of God, Powalski's lights FLICK off. And it's completely dark again.

Greg exhales. *He's got half a chance now.*

But then BANG!

A bullet WHIZZES past him, so close he feels the wind.

Michelle SHOOTs at him again.

BANG!

GREG DIVES into the scraggly weeds of the hillside.

Forming a new escape plan, he SCRAMBLES up toward Powalski's house, trying to be as quiet as possible --

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - YARD - NIGHT

Out of breath, Brett catches up with Michelle on the lawn. He's brought a knife from the kitchen.

BRETT
You hit him?

MICHELLE
I don't know.

BRETT
Where'd he go?

They hear SIRENS. They're faint and coming from far away, but they're coming.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Fuck. Did someone call 911? Fuck.

MICHELLE
We got to get him.

BRETT
Or we just let him run --
(over her protestations)
Hear me out. We tell the cops there were two home invaders. And this one? -- he ran away.

MICHELLE
He saw me shoot him.

BRETT

So he's lying! We say the opposite.
But how's it going to look that
we're hunting him down? Normal
people don't do that. Your attacker
leaves, you just call the police,
right?

MICHELLE

No.

BRETT

So we just go running around the
neighborhood with knives and guns,
Michelle??? We don't know where the
fuck he is.

They hear a RUSTLING from the hillside.

A clod of dirt ROLLS down. They look at each other --

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Greg SCRAMBLES up the hillside.

Getting CUT and SCRATCHED, his calloused hands GRAB hold of
whatever he can to pull himself up the steep incline.

EXT. POWALSKI'S PATIO - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Greg arrives on Powalski's patio where an eternity pool
STEAMS in the night. There's nice patio furniture and baskets
of thick, pristine white, cabana swim towels everywhere.

Greg steps toward the house and the motion activated LIGHTS
COME ON. Greg shields his eyes --

POWALSKI (O.S.)

Stop right there!

Greg THROWS his hands up in the air.

A figure comes forward from the shadows and the fog --

It's Mr. Powalski in his tattered blue robe.

He's got stogie in his mouth and a SHOTGUN in his hands.

EXT. HILLSIDE BETWEEN THE HOUSES -- NIGHT

In her bloody, dirt-covered night shirt, Michelle makes her
way up the scraggly, weedy hillside, cutting herself on all
the native vegetation.

Brett follows. He's much better at hill climbing. Probably because he has pants on.

But just as they start to make some time, the hillside is suddenly lit from below in alternating BLUE and RED lights.

Brett turns and looks down. To his horror, he sees a police car arriving on their little street.

MICHELLE

Come on --

Michelle looks at Brett. They look up the hill and then back down.

Making a decision, they redouble their efforts and PUSH on up the hill --

EXT. POWALSKI'S PATIO - NIGHT

Powalski pulls a shell from the pocket of his blue robe and loads it into the chamber as he moves in on Greg. But then he sees the dirt and blood and the abject fear in Greg's eyes --

POWALSKI

You okay, kid?

GREG

Help. They're trying to kill me --

Then, without warning and without malice, the SHOTGUN in Powalski's arms GOES OFF.

BLOOD SQUIRTS out of Greg's side, staining his blue work shirt red.

INT. COP CAR - NIGHT

COP #1 hears the SHOTGUN BLAST and grabs his RADIO --

COP #1

I've got a 10-57 here. Code 20.

EXT. POWALSKI'S PATIO - NIGHT

GREG

You shot me! Why'd you shoot me?!

POWALSKI

I'm sorry. This thing's got a hair trigger.

Greg pulls up his shirt and assesses the damage. Powalski winces at the sight of the wound.

POWALSKI (CONT'D)

Oh, geez.

Greg inspects it.

GREG

It only grazed me. I'll live.

POWALSKI

I got a first aid kit somewhere...

Powalski lumbers back toward the house.

GREG

No, wait! You got to go flag down the cop. Get an ambulance for my friend.

Powalski heads down the driveway. Stops.

POWALSKI

Can you make it to the house on your own? You need a hand?

GREG

I did two tours in Afghanistan.

POWALSKI

I do HVAC. Should never have got a shotgun. I feel like a real jerk.

Powalski is about to turn, but he sees something HEINOUS CRAWLING up onto his patio out of the hillside --

POWALSKI (CONT'D)

Brett? Michelle?

They're covered with blood and dirt. Brett puts his KNIFE DOWN on a patio table in a friendly, neighborly gesture and waves a small hello.

Michelle POINTS her GUN at Greg. He shakes with fear just seeing her again --

MICHELLE

He robbed us, Mr. Powalski. He's a home invader. Like on the news.

GREG

You're lying!

MICHELLE

You're lying!

GREG (CONT'D)

You shot at me!

Powalski looks from Michelle to Greg. He has no idea what's going on here or whom to believe.

POWALSKI

Look, I don't want to get involved--

GREG

You got to believe me. They set my friend up and then she shot him --

Without knowing it, Powalski has his shotgun aimed ever so slightly at Michelle and Brett. She clocks it.

MICHELLE

You and that gardener tried to rob us and you know it --

GREG

That "gardener" was Eddie Esperanza and he was my friend and one hell of an improv-er --

BRETT

Who cares? You're a thief. We're just defending ourselves and our home from criminals. Powalski, you can see what's going on here.

Now, Powalski's got the shotgun aimed a little more at Greg. Michelle smiles.

GREG

She shot Eddie like it was part of some game or something. She's a lunatic psycho!

MICHELLE

Any time a woman does anything not scripted she's crazy, is that it?

BRETT

Michelle, calm down.
(taking charge)
Powalski sees what's going on here.
He's going to help us, hon.

But Powalski's not sure what's going on. He HEARS a WOOP WOOP and looks down at the street -- a second COP CAR arrives.

POWALSKI

Okay, look. The police are here.
They'll sort this whole thing out --

There's a MUFFLED THUD and then --

Powalski looks down at his belly.

There's a GAPING HOLE where his gut used to be. He drops his cigar and his shotgun, looking completely confused.

Michelle holds a cabana towel with a smoking hole in it as her makeshift silencer. She moves in on Powalski --

GREG
SWEET JESUS!

BRETT
WHAT THE FUCK, MICHELLE?!

Michelle SHOOTS Powalski again. This time in the head.

INT. SECOND COP CAR - ARRIVING - NIGHT

A MUFFLED POP somewhere in the foggy hills. COP #2 looks up and over at COP #3.

COP #2
You hear that?

Another MUFFLED POP. *He heard that.* They grab their guns.

EXT. POWALSKI'S PATIO - NIGHT

Powalski goes down hard, DROPPING to his knees. His FACE PLANTS on the cement with a WET THWACK. Greg whimpers. Brett looks horrified --

BRETT
What the fuck are you doing?!

Greg puts his hands as high in the air as he can, surrendering completely. He knows he's next.

MICHELLE
He didn't believe us. I could tell.

BRETT
Because you should've let me do the talking. I'm good at bullshit --

Brett looks down at the COP CARS converging on the street below --

BRETT (CONT'D)
This is a big fucking mess,
Michelle. Fuck!

MICHELLE
There's only one bullet left.

BRETT

Okay.
(runs hands through hair)
Let me think.

Seeing an in, Greg begs for his life --

GREG

Please don't use that bullet on me.
Please. Don't. I'm just a
repairman. I just moved to LA. I
had a dream to be a --

BRETT

Don't tell me about your dream!
Stop talking!
(to Michelle; making up
his mind)
Okay. You're right, shoot him. This
is our last chance before the cops
get here.

GREG

No, please!

Michelle looks down the hill and sees the squad cars parked
outside the gate of her house. The officers get out of the
cars, guns drawn.

MICHELLE

(sad, reflective)
We're out of time, babe.

BRETT

Then do it now. Hurry.

But Michelle's got bigger fish to fry than Greg --

She AIMS the GUN at Brett.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Um... what are you doing?
(confused)
Point that thing at him.

MICHELLE

But I've only got one bullet left,
babe, I got to use it on you.

BRETT

Are you kidding me right now?!

MICHELLE

Come on, did you really think I just arbitrarily decided I wanted to kill someone for my anniversary present this year? Come on, Brett.

She wipes her eyes. Her nose is running.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I didn't want it to end like this but you gave me no choice.

BRETT

What the fuck is happening right now --

MICHELLE

I'm really torn up about this, okay? I've been teary all night, wrestling back and forth with whether I should actually do it or not. This is really hard for me.

BRETT

For you?

She nods, crying.

BRETT (CONT'D)

How are you able to spin it so that this is my fault? You're pointing a gun at me.

MICHELLE

I'm not the one calling divorce lawyers. I'm not the one lording an obscenely long pre-nup over your head --

BRETT

Always on about the fucking pre-nup, Michelle --

MICHELLE

I have the gun, I get to talk!

Greg checks on Powalski. He presses a beach towel to the back of Powalski's head while he checks for a pulse.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

You have no idea what it's like knowing that my whole life could be taken away from me at any minute. I've got to do what's best for me.

(MORE)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I've got to secure my future. Be smart about it. Be the hero of my own story --

BRETT

You are hurting me so bad right now, Michelle. Do you have any idea how terrible you're being?

Greg looks around for Powalski's shotgun but doesn't see it -- it's got to be UNDER POWALSKI.

BRETT (CONT'D)

You asked me to set this up for you. You said you wanted to know what it felt like to kill someone. I did that for you! Do you know how sick that is? That's how much I love you.

MICHELLE

When I heard you tell him you were going to kill me I had to worry that you'd had the same thought that I'd had, that you were planning the same thing I was tonight. That you were using the home invasion to get rid of me...

BRETT

Well, I wasn't because I'm not a fucking sociopath --

MICHELLE

It doesn't matter. That's not the point. It's just -- I knew in that moment that I had to go through with this.

(beat)

I have to get rid of you before you get rid of me. It's the only way.

Michelle grabs a towel as a silencer and pulls the hammer back.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

So just let me do this.

For the first time, Brett realizes that she's really going to do this --

BRETT

Stop. No. We can fix this, Michelle, okay?

(MORE)

BRETT (CONT'D)
I'll rip up that pre-nup right now.
I don't give a shit.

Brett's got her attention --

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

COPS #1, #2 and #3 JUMP the fence and FAN OUT all over the yard.

They MOVE at a fast clip, FEET POUNDING on the CRUSHED SHELLS. FLASHLIGHTS and GUNS drawn.

Cop #1 finds the broken glass door off the kitchen.

COP #1
Over here!

Cop #2 shines his flashlight inside, illuminating Esperanza's fallen body.

COP #2
We got one down. Call paramedics.

Cop #3 uses his RADIO to call for help. Cop #1 holds up the ski mask he finds with white piping. A Glock sits under it.

COP #1
What the hell is going on here?

EXT. POWALSKI'S PATIO - NIGHT

Michelle's got the gun leveled at Brett --

BRETT
I'll rip it up and we'll forget
this ever happened, okay? I forgive
you for acting like a crazy person
and plotting to murder me, okay?
It's behind us.

MICHELLE
How do I know that you won't renege
on that? And use this against me?

BRETT
Because I won't. Come on, babe.
Don't ruin the good thing that we
got.

He motions to them - bloody, dirty, one pointing the gun at the other. He doesn't see the irony.

BRETT (CONT'D)

I'm not going burn you. I promise.
The pre-nup kept you here. It took
away your escape route, don't you
see? Your nature tells you to get
rid of me a hundred times a week,
right? But the pre-nup made you
stay. But we don't need it anymore.
I can see that now.

(then)

Go all in with me, babe. Come on.

He's got her. But he just can't stop selling --

BRETT (CONT'D)

Stop keeping one foot out the door.
Stop thinking all "where's mine?"

This makes Michelle mad.

MICHELLE

That's easy for you to say because
it is all yours.

BRETT

Yeah.

MICHELLE

Well, now it's mine. Bye, Brett. I
really did love you.

She levels the gun at him.

BRETT

Do not do this --

But she does do it.

She SHOOTS Brett.

But it's not a clean shot. It HITS him in the leg.

And he goes down in a spray of ARTERIAL BLOOD and VISCERA.

BRETT (CONT'D)

What the fuck, Michelle?!

Michelle moves in on him --

Brett DRAGS himself along the length of the steaming infinity
pool, leaving a snail trail of blood and viscera.

She SHOOTS at him again. But the GUN only CLICKS.

No more bullets.

Michelle and Brett lock eyes.

It's on.

Brett SCREAMS for help.

Moving surprisingly fast for someone's whose leg is hamburger, he pulls himself toward the hillside dragging his wrecked, BLOODY HUNK of a leg behind him.

BRETT (CONT'D)
(calls out)
Up here! Help! I'm up here!

Michelle reverses course and GOES for Powalski's shotgun.

She SHOVES his big body off of the shotgun. But he's really, really heavy. All she's managing to push off is Powalski's blue robe. She looks around --

Sees Greg -- mystified by what's been playing out in front of him, he's been trying to stay as quiet as possible --
Michelle orders him --

MICHELLE
Help me!

Greg and Michelle push at Powalski. The big man's robe comes open. He's basically lying there in his tiny underwear now.

With Greg's help, Michelle gets her arm under Powalski girth and GRASPS the BARREL of the SHOTGUN. She's got it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Thank you.

She's goes after Brett, leaving Greg alone.

This is his chance to escape.

Greg assesses his options. Run down the driveway or run across the patio into Powalski's house.

SCRAMBLING to his feet, quiet as only a big man can be, Greg goes for the house --

POOLSIDE:

Michelle hunts Brett. PUMPING the SHOTGUN as she WALKS toward him through the steam and the fog --

BRETT
Help! Up here!

Michelle takes her SHOT.

But nothing happens. There's no shell in the chamber.

Michelle looks at the useless shotgun, betrayed.

And her feeling of betrayal only intensifies when --

Brett GRABS her ankle and TACKLES Michelle to the patio.

Something GLINTS in his hand.

Surprise. Brett's got the KNIFE he laid on the patio table earlier.

ROLLING on top of Michelle, he PINS her to the cement.

BRETT (CONT'D)
I don't want to hurt you but--

She KNEES him in the junk and STRUGGLES to get away with everything she's got.

Brett LAYS the KNIFE down to WRESTLE her flat.

Meanwhile, Greg RUNS for his life across the patio. He's almost to Powalski's back door when he KNOCKS a basket of towels into a GLASS TABLE. He tries to stop the inevitable--

But the GLASS TABLE HITS the PATIO and SHATTERS in a NOISY MESS.

MICHELLE
(to Brett)
He's getting away! Look! Stop him!

When Brett turns to look at the fleeing Greg, Michelle WRIGGLES away from him enough to reach for --

And GRAB --

The KNIFE on the ground.

And with no hesitation, Michelle STABS Brett in the back.

Brett's eyes GO WIDE and a TRICKLE of a blood comes out the corner of his mouth.

He stares at Michelle. Unbelievably.

Then his eyes go vacant and his BIG BODY goes LIMP and he FALLS face first on her.

Michelle struggles to UNTANGLE herself from him.

She ROLLS his dead weight off of her, freeing herself.

She RUNS after Greg into Powalski's house --

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

Cop #3 TRACKS footsteps through the dewy grass. They lead to the wild hillside. He shines his flashlight up there.

COP #3
They went this way!

INT. HALLWAY - POWALSKI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Holding a beach towel to his side, Greg hurries down a long palatial hallway.

He turns a CORNER --

Hobbling along, he looks around, lost, exhausted and terrified.

He turns another CORNER --

Michelle stands right there.

Bloody. Dirty. Filthy. Teary.

MICHELLE
I don't want to kill you. Okay?
I've already had to kill so many
people tonight. I'm not a bad
person. I don't even know you.

She blows a piece of wayward hair out of her face --

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
I think you and I can make a deal.

This is not what Greg was expecting.

Michelle TOSSES him the empty gun.

On instinct, Greg CATCHES it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
The Malibu police are going to be
here in about a minute. So this is
what we're going to do.
(MORE)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

You're going to find somewhere inside here to hide and when I'm back from the hospital later today, I'll come and find you and we can work out the details of our deal. Something mutually beneficial. How does that sound?

GREG

I can't trust you.

MICHELLE

Sure you can. I'm out of bullets.

This is not a convincing argument.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Now the other option is I tell the police that you and Esperanza robbed us. That you shot Brett and Powalski. And look? You've got fingerprints on the gun and blood at the crime scene.

Greg looks down at the gun in his hands. He drops it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Or option three, I tell them you have bags of guns and ammo and that you're hiding in this house somewhere. We can see how that goes for you. Whose story do you think they're going to believe, yours or mine?

GREG

I'm a marine, lady.

MICHELLE

(leaning in)

And I was the star of a UPN show that ran for two and a half seasons.

They look at each other.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

What do you say --

(reads his name off his shirt)

-- Greg? Want to roll the dice with the Malibu police or me?

Greg looks upset. He doesn't like those odds.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL, SANTA MONICA - NIGHT

It's still night, but dawn is slowly breaking in the east in muted pinks and oranges.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM, HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Michelle sits on an examination table, wrapped in a police issued, steel blanket.

Red-eyed and snot nosed, it looks like she's been crying for days.

Two plains-clothed detectives enter. The woman, DETECTIVE MIA BROWN (30's), never went to charm school. Her hair is pulled back in a severe ponytail and she wears no make-up. The man, DETECTIVE LUIS DE LA CRUZ, (60's) is chubby, friendly and sharp as tack.

DETECTIVE BROWN
I'm Detective Brown. This is
Detective De La Cruz.

De La Cruz smiles and nods.

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ
Hello.

DETECTIVE BROWN
We need you to walk us through the
events of the night.

MICHELLE
I don't know if I can right now.

DETECTIVE BROWN
Try.

Michelle looks annoyed.

MICHELLE
May I get a cup of water? Please.

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ
Of course. Here ya go.

Michelle smiles at Detective De La Cruz, turning on the sweet.

MICHELLE
Thank you, Detective.

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ
Long night?

MICHELLE

(snort)

You don't know the half of it.

The detectives are burning to look at each other, but they're disciplined. Detective Brown pulls over a chair --

DETECTIVE BROWN

Start at the beginning, Mrs.
Hardwick.

EXT. POWALSKI'S HOUSE - MORNING

The sun has come up and everything is new again.

INT. HALLWAY - POWALSKI'S HOUSE - MORNING

Greg crawls out of a closet and walks down the palatial halls.

Waiting to be caught any second, he looks over his shoulder anxiously.

A POLICE RADIO CRACKLES somewhere outside. Nearby.

Greg lies his hand on a wall sconce and gets the surprise of his life when a secret door in the wall SLIDES OPEN.

Not in a position to look a gift horse in the mouth, Greg DUCKS inside the secret hiding spot.

INT. LABORATORY - POWALSKI'S HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Once inside, Greg finds a button that, when pressed, CLOSES the secret door.

Greg lets out his breath for the first time in hours.

He's safe.

But where exactly is he?

Greg looks around. It's a laboratory of sorts. But it's not meth or illegal arms, the thing that appears to be studied here is

HVAC units.

One hundred different types of tubing are spread out on one table. And two different experiments are running concurrently behind glass on either side of the lab.

And then there's a pink unit the size of the shoe box that sits on a table all by itself. Glossy and perfect.

Greg goes up and presses the "on" button.

Instantly, cold, delicious, silent air blows in his face.
It's like manna from heaven.

It's only now, in the bright lights of the laboratory that we
can finally make out the name of the business Greg works for
on the back of his work shirt --

It's an air-conditioning repair business.

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

St. Johns in Santa Monica.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - HOSPITAL - MORNING

Michelle finishes her fantastic tale --

MICHELLE

-- I shot him, I ran and the second
one --

DETECTIVE BROWN

The Asian one? With the accent?

MICHELLE

Malaysian accent. Yes. He chased
Brett and me. We tried to escape to
the neighbor's but the gunman
caught up with us and shot --

DETECTIVE BROWN

The neighbor?

MICHELLE

Yes.

DETECTIVE DA LA CRUZ

And your husband?

MICHELLE

Yes.

DETECTIVE BROWN

But not you.

MICHELLE

He missed.

DETECTIVE BROWN

Twice?

Michelle nods.

DETECTIVE BROWN (CONT'D)
What are the odds?

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ
You an actress, Mrs. Hardwick?

MICHELLE
I was. Years ago. More of a
waitress really.

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ
"Hollywood Hills Hotel," right?

She says nothing. Steers the conversation elsewhere.

MICHELLE
Poor Brett. How could this happen
to him? And on our anniversary.

DETECTIVE BROWN
What anniversary is it?

MICHELLE
Eleventh.

DETECTIVE BROWN
I mean what gift? Crystal? China?
Silver?

MICHELLE
Um... Steel, I think.

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ
Steel? What kind of gift is that,
huh?

DETECTIVE BROWN
A Glock 43?

Michelle shoots a reproachful look at Detective Brown, this
is in poor taste.

DETECTIVE BROWN (CONT'D)
Or maybe more like a cutlery set?

Michelle realizes it's more than just poor taste. This is an
accusation. She stiffens. *Does Detective Brown know
something?*

DETECTIVE BROWN (CONT'D)
I haven't got the chance to tell
you, Mrs. Hardwick, but you weren't
the only survivor last night.

This is terrible news for Michelle and her face gives her away. She was never a very good actress to begin with.

MICHELLE

Really?

DETECTIVE BROWN

Yes. And as soon as he's out of surgery, we're going to be very interested to hear his version of last night's events.

With this, the detectives get up, stretch, gather their things and walk out of the room.

Michelle is left utterly devastated.

DETECTIVE BROWN (CONT'D)

Don't know if it will best a new knife set or a Glock, but I got something else for you made of steel.

Detective Brown RATTLES her handcuffs.

DETECTIVE BROWN (CONT'D)

Happy anniversary, Mrs. Hardwick.

The rug has just been pulled out from under Michelle. She's going down. *Fuck.*

EXT. HALLWAY, HOSPITAL - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Detectives Brown and De La Cruz come out of the examination room and walk down the hall.

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ

She didn't ask who.

DETECTIVE BROWN

Who what?

DETECTIVE DE LA CRUZ

Who lived?

DETECTIVE BROWN

Because it doesn't matter who. She tried to kill all of them. She knows she's fucked no matter who lived.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - RESTAURANT - DUSK

TITLE CARD: ONE YEAR LATER

Chapter Four: "In Sickness and in Health"

CLOSE ON: Michelle's face. Her hair is tied back in a bun. She wears a button down white shirt and a wee little bow tie.

She enters the bar of the restaurant.

MICHELLE
Mr. and Mrs. Klein?

PULL OUT to reveal that Michelle is carrying two dinner menus.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Your table is ready. Follow me,
please.

INT. RESTAURANT - DUSK

Michelle seats the KLEINS at the best table in the house. The sun is just beginning to set over the Pacific.

MICHELLE
I'd like to tell you about
tonight's specials. We have a sweet
butter poached Nova Scotian
lobster...

ACROSS THE DINING ROOM - the Hostess and Henry the Waiter gossip by the kitchen door.

HOSTESS
I heard she's a murderess.

WAITER
Allegedly.

HOSTESS
No, I heard she *did* it.

EXT. RESTAURANT, VALET STAND - DUSK

Michelle leaves work with a to-go box. Keys in hand, she waves to the VALET GUYS as she walks past.

MICHELLE
Good night, Jose. Good night,
Manny.

DOWN THE HILL:

Michelle gets to her car --

Which is a white utility van with a handicap lift. She gets in.

EXT. PCH - NIGHT

Michelle drives along PCH. At a red light, she counts her tip money.

EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - DUSK

There is a "FOR SALE" sign in the formerly well manicured yard that is now overgrown.

That's what happens when you shoot your landscaper.

Michelle parks the van and exits. She walks past a boneyard of the dead plants. Everything that was not drought resistant has died out.

There's a janky wheelchair ramp up from the car park to the front door.

INT. FOYER - DUSK

Michelle enters and puts her keys in a 'World's #1 Patient' cup on the entry table. She takes the to-go box with her --

MICHELLE

Babe?

INT. DEN - NIGHT

The den has been transformed into a makeshift bedroom. Michelle enters with the to-go box and two forks.

Brett sits in a wheelchair. He's wearing a nice blazer that probably once fit but is now too big on his shrunken frame.

His head is cocked at that unnatural Christopher Reeves angle and he's got a colostomy bag.

MICHELLE

Whatcha doing in the chair, babe?

AUTOMATED VOICE

Happy anniversary, babe.

MICHELLE

(surprised)

What?

"GUILTY" by Barbara Streisand and Barry Gibbs starts to PLAY.

AUTOMATED VOICE
Let's dance.

Michelle laughs. And he laughs.

Brett who can't walk, can't talk and needs care for the rest of his life, spins in a circle. His version of a wheelie.

INT. APARTMENT - KOREA TOWN - DUSK

Henry the waiter stands at his apartment window, watching a billboard go up across the street.

It's for "The Groom." And the new bachelor is a thinner, buffer, contact lens version of --

"GREG - Marine and Millionaire Inventor"

The poster shows Greg holding up a glossy pink HVAC unit -- known the world over as the revolutionary "Baxter."

Henry shakes his head in disbelief and envy.

HENRY
Fuck that guy.

Henry KICKS his couch.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Michelle helps Brett into bed, careful to prop him up with pillows and hang his colostomy bag on its hook by the bed.

MICHELLE
I got us something good.

She brings over the to-go box and two forks from the kitchen. She takes off the lid. Brett picks up a fork and tastes it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
What do you think?

AUTOMATED VOICE
Beetroot and chocolate cake?

MICHELLE
Happy anniversary, babe.

AUTOMATED VOICE
What else was on the menu?

MICHELLE

Oh, let's see, there was an orchard crumble with pears and blackberries.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Mmmm.

MICHELLE

And a fudgy fig roll.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Start with the entrees.

MICHELLE

I will, but first, did you see our ratings? This season is killing it. Everyone loves a rags to riches story.

AUTOMATED VOICE

He's so ugly. It's kind of amazing.

MICHELLE

He's ugly, but he's got like a real man sex appeal that America seems to like.

AUTOMATED VOICE

What do I care? It's not my fucking show anymore.

MICHELLE

Hey, I'm sorry we had to sell off the show and all our assets and go bankrupt defending ourselves, but it will all be over one day. And we'll get back to normal.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Detective Brown's going to keep coming at us. She knows I'm lying to her. She wants to punish us.

MICHELLE

Forget her.

(then)

What's the first thing you're going to do when we get our old lives back?

AUTOMATED VOICE
Unparalyze myself and fix it so
that I don't have to carry a bag of
shit with me everywhere I go.

MICHELLE
I really am sorry, babe.

AUTOMATED VOICE
I know. I got you something. For
our anniversary.

MICHELLE
You did?

AUTOMATED VOICE
It's over there.

MICHELLE
Is this the secret thing you've
been working on for months, babe?

AUTOMATED VOICE
Not saying.

MICHELLE
Ordering special parts for it?

AUTOMATED VOICE
My lips are sealed.

MICHELLE
Where is it?

AUTOMATED VOICE
Top drawer of the dresser.

MICHELLE
Oh goody. You've been so secretive.

As Michelle crawls across the bed --

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
What is twelve years anyway?

AUTOMATED VOICE
Linen, colored gems and pearls.

MICHELLE
Oh, I'm excited. I've always wanted
me some colored gems.

Michelle opens the top drawer of the dresser and finds a
sloppily wrapped gift about the size of --

A pipe bomb.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Aww. You even wrapped it yourself.
You really shouldn't have, babe.

She unwraps the paper.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
After what I did to you, I think
you're free to never get me a gift
again as long as we live.

She rips the rest of the wrapping paper off revealing a bare cardboard box. Not exactly what she was expecting.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Alright, you got me. I'm intrigued.

AUTOMATED VOICE
It was very hard to find a way to
top last year.

Michelle holds the box in her hands. She shakes it.

Is that a smile on Brett's partially paralyzed face?

MICHELLE
What is it, babe?

But Michelle's happiness takes a sudden, sharp turn. She
HEARS something...

TICKING.

She cocks her head.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
You hear that?

She opens the package.

Revealing a **BOMB**

Pounds of PLASTIC EXPLOSIVE are sloppily shoved in to capacity under a DETONATOR. Way more serious than your average pipe bomb, this fucker's got behemoth power.

The countdown TICKS: 6 seconds

Michelle looks up at Brett in horror --

5 seconds

Her face is pure panic and terror --

AUTOMATED VOICE
Happy anniversary, babe.

Brett smiles.

4 seconds

Then, inconceivably, Michelle's panic begins to morph into something else --

3 seconds

Something that looks like acceptance.

A tectonic revelation sweeps her face --

2 seconds

And she looks at Brett, a tear in her eye --

1 second

MICHELLE
Oh, honey, it's perfect.

KA-BOOM!!!!!!!!!!

INT/EXT. HARDWICK HOUSE - NIGHT

The Hardwick's Spanish Colonial EXPLODES.

As "Guilty" PLAYS, a FIREBALL ROLLS through the house in SLOW MOTION DESTROYING everything in its path --

The posters for "The Groom" -- INSTANT ASH.

The abandoned master bedroom and bathroom -- BOOM. GONE.

The rippling FIRE BALL INCINERATES the gun safe and the replacement baby Buddha, turning them to MOLTEN PUDDLES.

The house gets SHREDDED, top to bottom.

Everything becomes INSTANT SHRAPNEL --

LAUNCHING up hundreds of feet in the night air --

The FLAMING PIECES of Michelle and Brett's lives SHOOT out like ROCKETS and FIREWORKS.

The bits and embers SCATTER and FALL all over the dry Malibu hillside like the most brilliant meteor shower ever.

FADE OUT

THE END